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ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION GLOBAL BRANCH 1370

NEWSLETTER



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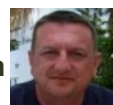
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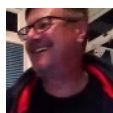
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**The Association pavoir stone at
The National Memorial
Arboretum
Alrewas, Staffordshire**



IN THIS ISSUE

EDITORS NOTES	3
A FRENCH COMMEMORATION	4
ABINGDON SHOW	6
BRANCH WELFARE	8
VETERAN'S AFFAIRS	9
BRANCH VISIT	12
DISCOUNT INFORMATION	13
TSR-2	15
CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS	18
FUNDRAISING	19
THE FORGOTTEN BOMBER	21
LET'S 'AV A LARF	25

Disclaimer - The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the RAFA Global Branch, the Newsletter Editor, Branch Committee or Membership and therefore should not be construed as such.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

(Still at the Jet2 check in)

Summer has come and gone, or did it just go?! The time for our overseas AGM is drawing near and I am sure we are all looking forward to some winter sun....and maybe the odd one or ten cold beers. The last few months have been busy for several members of the Committee. Preparing for parachute jumps, organising Wings Appeal Days, coercing people into manning the stall at Abingdon and preparing for the National Conference...that's just the Chairman, the rest of us have been watching and learning!!!!

As Standard Bearer for North Weald & Ongar RMG, I have been on parade at St. Clement Danes for the Founders Day Service, Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park for the annual Veterans Service organised by the RAFBF, Capel le Ferne for Battle of Britain Commemoration, an annual event organised to remember the beginning of the battle by Friend's of the Few, London City Wings Appeal Collection where a total of £7903.77 was collected and Westminster Abbey for the Battle of Britain Memorial Service as well as attending several funerals and being involved in the Laying Up of RAFA Halstead Branch Standard.

World affairs seem to be grabbing the headlines of late. Two attempted assassinations, a new government, the possibility of a female leader of the "free world", escalating conflicts and the disappearing Winter Fuel Allowance. People call it progress!!!!

Very sad news that a Royal Navy Merlin Mk 4 pilot died, following a ditching, during a night flying exercise with HMS Queen Elizabeth in the Solent on 4th September.

Any members who have points they would like the Committee to discuss should ensure that the Hon. Secretary receives them by the 10th of the month so they can be added to the agenda. Committee meetings are usually held on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

Attached to the Newsletter you will find an appendix which, in the interests of inclusivity and information, the Chairman feels should be read and understood by all. It is concerning the "one member, one vote" resolution which has been tabled for discussion and ratification at the upcoming National Conference. Steve Mullis feels it is of the utmost importance that members let him know which way they want him to vote, on our behalf, in this radical change to the voting system. I realise it is quite a tome to plough through but PLEASE make a concerted attempt to read, understand the implications and let Steve know your thoughts.

As this is the last edition before Christmas may I be the first to wish you and yours A Very Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year.



A COMMEMORATION IN BRITTANY WITH DIFFERENCES

A member of both the Global Branch and the Sud Ouest Branch in France, a few weeks ago, I responded to a request from our esteemed Sud Ouest Secretary for someone to represent the Branch at a Commemoration in the Val d'Izé, a few miles east of Rennes. This was to turn out to be a ceremony with a difference, indeed, 2 differences.

First, it is worth recalling that many French villages are assiduous in having ceremonies to honour those of the Royal Air Force and Allied Air Forces who, as they see it, gave their lives for the return of freedom to France during WW2. Crash sites are generally marked with a stone or plaque, often with a description of events and aircrew victims are often buried in the villages with their graves marked by Commonwealth War Grave Commission's headstones. Members of the Sud Ouest Branch are frequently invited to participate in these events. It is a great privilege to participate - where one is seen as representing, of course, the RAFA but, in French eyes, the Royal Air Force and its WW2 history and the United Kingdom.

Back to the narrative. Secretary Terry asked for someone to go to a Ceremony to mark the downing on 8 August 1944 of an Albemarle, tail no P1501, from 296 Squadron at RAF Brize Norton. To my shame, despite 30 years of RAF service and a considerable amount of reading WW2 aviation history, I knew nothing of the Albemarle. Readers like me can consult:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armstrong_Whitworth_Albemarle



The crew of P1501, along with several others, had been tasked with dropping weapons, munitions and supplies to the French Resistance and SAS/SOE Jedburgh Teams operating in the southern Brittany area after D Day as a means of obstructing the Nazis from reinforcing the Normandy area. The aircraft was shot down before the load could be dropped. The body of one crew member, Sergeant Cowham, was found, without a parachute, about 100 metres from the crash site. Sadly, there was no trace of the remaining crew members, one Australian and 4 British – the aircraft had exploded on impacting the ground. With the load of munitions, the explosion and the resultant crater was enormous.

Here was Unusual Fact 1.

Until 2013 and discovery of the remains of the aircraft, it had been assumed that it had been shot down by a German fighter. Research by French enthusiasts and Chris Goss subsequently found that there were no German fighters operating in the area that night and that the aircraft had almost certainly been shot down by a 604 Sqn RAF Mosquito which had mistaken the Albemarle profile for that of a Dornier. In today's jargon : blue on blue. More details , albeit in French, are at:

https://francecrashes39-45.net/page_fiche_av.php?id=2745

The ceremony went off in a familiar format for these events : a speech of welcome by Monsieur le Maire and another by the Association which had unearthed the aircraft remains. I said a few words on behalf of the RAFA and prepared to lay a RAFA wreath and to recite the Ode of Remembrance.

And here comes Unusual Fact 2.

A be-medalled individual in a green beret and submariner's « wings » stepped forward to say a few words and to gift a plaque to the Mayor – on behalf of the Old Bridlingtonian Former Pupils' Association. It then became clear that this is an exceptionally active FPs' Association. During internet research they had learned that this ceremony was to take place and had invited themselves – gratefully welcomed by the organisers. One of the crew victims, Flight Sergeant Abell, was a former pupil of Bridlington Grammar School and several couples had come on behalf of the School, to honour his sacrifice.

Wreaths were laid and all present went to the Mairie for drinks during which so much more was made clear concerning this sad episode. A sprightly and very lucid octogenarian who had been living with his parents in 1944 in a farmhouse yards from the crash site was able to describe what had happened 80 years ago.

This was, indeed, a ceremony of remembrance with a difference.

My thanks to David Forsyth for this article. Out of our 600+ members he was one of only two to answer my plea. Ed.

ABINGDON AIR & COUNTRY SHOW

The show was later than usual this year due to administrative problems which precluded non-military aircraft from landing or taking off from the airfield. As a result the display was severely curtailed and the only aeroplane to land and depart was a C-17 which made the long journey from RAF Brize Norton!

Friday afternoon I met with Steve Mullis and we assembled the Gazebo and laid out the goodies ready for Saturday, Steve was taking part in the parachute jump and for some reason decided that I was capable of “running the stall” in his absence.

Saturday morning dawned with the daunting prospect of rain, thunder and wind. Steve Coleman, Stan Brimmer, Graham Hudson all arrived bright and early to help my wife and I. 10:00 arrived, the gates were opened and a few people began to trickle in. It was going to be a long, slow day and the weather did little to help.



At midday the weather began to improve and the number of visitors gradually increased. The Red Arrows ducks proved to be the best of our sales items.

The flying display began at around midday and, although fewer aircraft than usual were participating, it was great to see the Hawker Hurricane and Vampire display in particular.

There was also some excellent displays by the local model aircraft club flying their radio controlled models.



Steve Coleman, Stan Brimmer, Graham Hudson, Clive Simpson

Business improved during and after the flying and we all had to work hard to “persuade” people to part with their money. The fact that, due to the foresight of our Chairman, we are now able to take card payment certainly improved the sales numbers.

A total of £203.13 was raised which, although disappointing, considering the weather and time of year was a reasonable amount.

My thanks to Graham and Stan for turning up and so ably helping. Let’s hope that in 2025 the show returns to its normal schedule and that the problem with airfield use is resolved.

BRANCH WELFARE

Hello to all our members, as your Branch Welfare officer I would just like to inform of who I am and my roles and what we can do no matter what your welfare needs may be, it can be anything from solving mobility issues to needing a washing machine or even simply signposting you to find information so you can solve yourselves.

Currently I hold multiple roles within the welfare set up of RAFA. My volunteering consists of being a Befreinder, a Caseworker/ Welfare Officer for the Northern Area and of course Branch welfare Officer.

With our branch being digital there are many ways to ask for assistance but the best way is via email welfare.rafa.globalbranch1370@gmail.com,

I also pick up cases on rafa.welfare1962@gmail.com.

Other ways are contacting RAFA Welfare teams directly at Leicester or Preston via the main web pages where they have online short form and a telephone number 0800 0182361 .

IF for any reason you feel the need to make contact with myself or any of the committee via the Facebook page PLEASE ask But no details and admin will make contact and then delete the post this covers your privacy. I must state though the Facebook page is a last resort.

Should you require to talk we can send you our telephone number privately.

Whereever you are in the UK or the World I am here to help in any way I can.

WE ARE A FAMILY AND YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

All the best

Andrew Bellamy

HWO/ Northern Area Caseworker Welfare Officer and Befreinder

VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

HEARING LOSS CLAIMS

Thousands more ex-servicemen and women will receive compensation for hearing loss suffered during training or combat.

Military personnel are repeatedly exposed to loud noises, such as gunfire and bombing, during their careers.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has opposed many claims made by veterans experiencing hearing loss, arguing other sources of noise were to blame, individuals should have worn protection or their claims were too late.

Now it has accepted exposure to noise in the military has been a cause of hearing loss and that people discharged after 1987 could be eligible for compensation.

Between 2012 and 2020, the MoD paid £72m in compensation for military hearing loss, settling more than 9,000 cases. But it is likely this new court agreement will result in many more service people receiving payments, with up to 10,000 currently making claims.

It should be noted that claims are best made using the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme rather than using a "No win, No fee" Law Company.

Claims should be submitted to: Veterans-UK@mod.gov.uk

Download the PDF on this site for full details:

Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Claim Customer Journey

FORCES CONNECT APP

Have you discovered the Forces Connect App?

A simple tool helping you find support for the Armed Forces Community in just four clicks!

The Forces Connect App links users to local and national organisations offering immediate help and support across a wide range of services. From crisis support to searching for a NHS dentist, starting a business to advice on housing.

The app supports the entire Armed Forces Community – serving, former service and their families. There are many organisations able to offer informed assistance that could make a real difference to someone in need.

If you work with residents you will undoubtedly meet members of this community and the Forces Connect App puts the ability to help at your fingertips.

The Forces Connect App has been steadily growing since its launch in 2018, enabled by funding from MOD Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. We are proud of the increasing support received from partners including NHS, Police and military bodies.

Initially covering regions in the south east, it now represents areas from Cornwall to Argyll & Bute helping those areas to meet the obligations of the Armed Forces Act 2021. It now has more than 33,000 downloads.

If you would like to find out more please contact Forces Connect by emailing **fcse@surreycc.gov.uk** and we would be happy to help!

PENSIONS UPDATE

All our members make sure you get what you're entitled too. Any members that served 1975 onward under AFPS 75 no matter your engagement 3,6,or 9 you will be able to apply for a preserved pension payable at 60 yrs of age, you get one free forecast per year by contacting **JPAC, Kentigern House, Glasgow, G2 8EX, Tel 0800 085 3600**.

Application to be put in 3 months before your 60th birthday. Upon your 60th you normally receive a tax free lump sum then every 4 weeks your normal entitlement which is classed as taxable income.

Unfortunately it is amazing how many veterans don't realise they are entitled to this pension..

This is different from the veterans agency war pension which is paid for injury sustained during service and usually noted in your medical records

DMRC STANFORD HALL

In August a group of us from Victory Services Club visited the Defence Military Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC), located on the Stanford Hall estate in Loughborough. Originally, situated at Headley Court, Leatherhead, the DMRC moved to its current home in June 2018.

DMRC Stanford Hall is run by the Ministry of Defence. It forms part of Defence Medical Services and all its patients are serving members of the Armed Forces. The centre, run by a Commanding Officer (CO), has its professional staff comprising both members of the Armed Forces alongside civilians employed by the MoD replicating the model that worked so well for over 70 years at Headley Court.

DMRC Stanford Hall is an entirely bespoke facility with enhanced rehabilitation facilities in many areas. It combines the latest technology with proven therapy, providing buildings and spaces specially designed to aid the recovery process and deliver the



The imposing entrance to Stanford Hall

specific functions of rehabilitation medicine.

The centre also contains gyms, swimming and hydrotherapy pools, a gait lab and all the elements essential for its clinical purpose. That purpose includes rehabilitation of the most seriously injured members of the Armed Forces and also, importantly, returning those who have been injured in the course of service back to duty, or supporting transition into civilian life.

During the day, the we heard from the CO, Group Captain Claire Myhill KHDS RAF, as well as a former patient, and the DMRC Benevolent Fund charity team. A short tour followed the presentations of the site.

It was an inspiring day, reminding visitors that although the UK Armed Forces may not be actively engaged in ground warfare at present, the number of injured personnel referred to the DMRC remains steady. While the nature of the injuries may change, incidents, accidents, and illnesses continue, hence the need for ongoing treatment and support available to serving personnel.

The VSC and DMRC have maintained a strong and enduring partnership, with the VSC continuing to support the DMRC Benevolent Fund, offering patients Respite and Welfare breaks to assist in their journey towards full recovery.

BRANCH VISIT 18th NOV 2024

The proposed branch visit has suddenly moved location from Hendon to RAF Cosford.

So here are the details.

Hotel:

Telford Central Hotel,
Euston Way,
Telford,
Shropshire,
TF3 4LY

<https://www.premierinn.com/gb/en/home.html>

Prices for Sunday 17th Nov 2024 start at £35 pay now or £59 pay on arrival with full cancellation

FREE Parking

Visit to Cosford to start at 10am on Monday 18th Nov 2024
Advisable to book parking online, as it is cheaper!!!
Also book your FREE entry tickets for same time.

<https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/midlands/>

Then scroll down to Book Tickets!!!!

Please message the Chairman when booked to confirm your attendance.

This is an open branch visit meaning it is available to any member.

So come on boys & girls lets get it done!!!!

INFORMATION FOR THE MEMBERS.

I am not going into Welfare Support Area, there are people with that information available to help, my intention is to mention a few things I have found as a response to questions below, which may be of use to others.

Do you have your Veteran Status registered on your Medical Record at your Surgery? I checked recently to see if my Doctors Surgery were aware that I was a Military Veteran, to my surprise, I found they weren't aware despite serving as an FTRS when joining the Surgery, so on production of my MOD 100 to the Surgery office admin, it was immediately added.

Do you know about the Veterans Badge, Veterans ID, DDS or BLC? I have met many Veterans, not necessarily in RAFA or in this Branch, but I am surprised to find out that there is a lot of people who don't know about the following, which they are entitled to apply for:

Veterans Badge: Free on application <https://www.gov.uk/apply-medal-or-veterans-badge>

Veterans ID: (MOD 100) Free on Application. A relatively new card, which has been available to Service Leavers since 2019, If you left before 2019, and currently have a safe useable UK Address you can now Apply (this is not a discount card, but people have used it to gain discounts). Its primary function is to quickly prove your veteran status, to the likes of the NHS and other organisations.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-veterans-affairs>

Defence Discount Service (DDS): provides discounts both online and on the high street for members of the Armed Forces, Veterans and Armed Forces Community. Defence Discount Service is home of the Defence Privilege Card, the vetted discount card that can be used in stores, restaurants and venues to obtain armed forces discounts. This discount card is available to:

Serving Armed Forces

Reserve Forces

Spouses/Partners of serving personnel

HM Armed Forces Veterans (ex-serving)

MoD Civil Servants

Bereaved Family Members

War/Service Widow(er)s

Cadet Forces (over 16)

NATO Personnel in the UK

Physical card cost £5 for 4 Years.

When you apply, you will need to provide proof of entitlement, MOD 100 can help.

<https://www.defencediscountservice.co.uk/index.php>

Blue Light Card (BLC): Like DDS but available to a wider audience:

4x4 Response	Highways England Traffic Officer
MoD Police	Home Office
Mountain Rescue	HM Armed Forces Veterans
NHS including retired & volunteers	HM Coastguard
Optometrists	HM Prison & Probation Services
Police including retired	Lowland Search and Rescue
Red Cross	MoD Civil Servants
Reserve Armed Forces	MoD Fire Service
RNLI	MoD Police
Royal Air Force	Mountain Rescue
Royal Marines	NHS including retired & volunteers
Royal Navy	Optometrists
Search and Rescue	Police including retired
Social Care Workers	Red Cross
Ambulance Service including retired	Reserve Armed Forces
Blood Bikes	RNLI
British Army	Royal Air Force
Cave Rescue	Royal Marines
Community First Responders	Royal Navy
Dental Practice	Search and Rescue
Fire Service including retired	Social Care Workers

Blue Light Card also works with small and large companies across the UK to get involved in supporting the Blue Light community

BLC discounts are similar to the DDS, as they are run by the same company, but there are differences in range of available discounts.

Physical card cost £5 for 2 Years.

Thing to note the offers available may only be for use Online or on the High Street, also they may only be available for a set period of time and may be subject to change. When you apply, you will need to provide proof of entitlement, MOD 100 can help.

<https://www.bluelightcard.co.uk/index.php>

A couple of discount examples I use

Apart from using at many Restaurants, where you can get anything from 15 to 25% off food either by presenting the card or by downloading a voucher code from the App, to present. There are thousands of discounts available and the list changes on a weekly basis.

One I have used regularly for some years.

ESSO Fuel Card, this has changed a few times since I first got one, currently I get 4 pence per litre off all my Diesel fuel purchased from ESSO. The Fuel card is linked to your debit card, you pay with the fuel card at the garage, then it comes out of your bank account a few days later at the lower price. I have saved over £50 this year so far.

This is one I have come across in the last month.

Under Gift card Discounts, it is the Re loadable Card, The one I have is for Tesco, not sure if available for other stores, it is a re loadable cash card which is used to make purchases in Tesco (there are exceptions listed in the conditions) but I am using it for my weekly shopping. I pre-load it from a linked debit card and then get the cashier to scan the Card at the till. The money is saved when pre-loading the card, at 3.5%, e.g. I put £100 on the card it costs me £96.50, from my debit card, I forecast that I will save over £10 in the first month of use.

Hope this provides a useful insight, for those that haven't heard of these things.

Thanks to Robin Noble for this article. Ed.

TSR-2 WHITE ELEPHANT OR MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

The British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) TSR-2 was a cancelled Cold War tactical strike and reconnaissance aircraft developed for the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

The programme influenced the direction of the British aircraft industry and many of its design and technological breakthroughs could be seen in subsequent aircraft designs.

The project for a low-level tactical strike and reconnaissance aircraft was conducted against requirement (G)OR.339. This was issued in 1956, and indicated that the Government was only willing to give this contract to a consortium of companies, thereby forcing rationalisation of the industry. Initial submissions such as the P.17A were also made by Shorts / English Electric and the NA.39 by Blackburn Aircraft.

The Air Ministry eventually selected the P.17A and the Vickers-Armstrong Type 571 for further consideration although it soon became known that the Ministry favoured the Vickers submission which included not only the aircraft design but also a 'total systems concept'.

Following huge government pressure, Bristol Aeroplane Company, English Electric Company, Vickers-Armstrong Limited and Hunting Aircraft all combined in 1960 to form the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) to produce the BAC TSR-2. The remaining major concerns, de Havilland, Hawker Siddeley, Gloster Aircraft, Armstrong Whitworth, Folland Aircraft and Blackburn Aircraft combined to form Hawker Siddeley Aviation Ltd to concentrate on other civil and military contracts.

The TSR-2 was a very long (89 ft) slim aircraft with a shoulder-mounted delta wing and turned down wing tips. Power was provided by two Bristol Siddeley Olympus 320 engines equipped with afterburners. The tandem main wheel units retracted into the fuselage, allowing a very thin wing to be fitted. The fin and horizontal tail surfaces were all-moving and provided control around all axes, with the ailerons providing both pitch and roll control.

The prototype TSR-2 (XR219) made its first flight at Boscombe Down on 27th September 1964, in the hands of test pilot Roland Beamont and was the only example to fly. The development programme showed that the design had great potential, although engine development and undercarriage retraction problems caused delays to the flight test programme.

On another test flight, the port main undercarriage failed to retract as the 'down' selector successfully lowered the nose and starboard main undercarriages but left both main undercarriages with bogies in a partially extended vertical position. Beamont determined that a landing was possible due to the good low-speed handling characteristics of the aircraft and, after consultation with the ground engineers, conducted a very gentle approach with low sink rate. At touchdown, both bogies rotated to the correct position; the problem was soon resolved and the test programme continued.

The cost of the programme became a matter of political contention and at two Cabinet meetings held on 1st April 1965, it was decided to cancel the BAC TSR-2. This was claimed to be on the grounds of projected costs, although some point more directly to a political option to acquire up to 110 General Dynamics F-111 aircraft from the USA. The decision was announced in the Budget Speech of 6th April 1965.

The maiden flight of the second development aircraft (XR220) was due to happen on the same day but following an accident in conveying the airframe to Boscombe Down by road this never happened.

The subsequent cancellation of BAC TSR-2 led the industry to focus on collaborative projects such as the military Jaguar and Tornado, and civil projects such as Concorde and Airbus



XR219 The only TSR-2 airframe to fly and now displayed at the RAF Museum Cosford

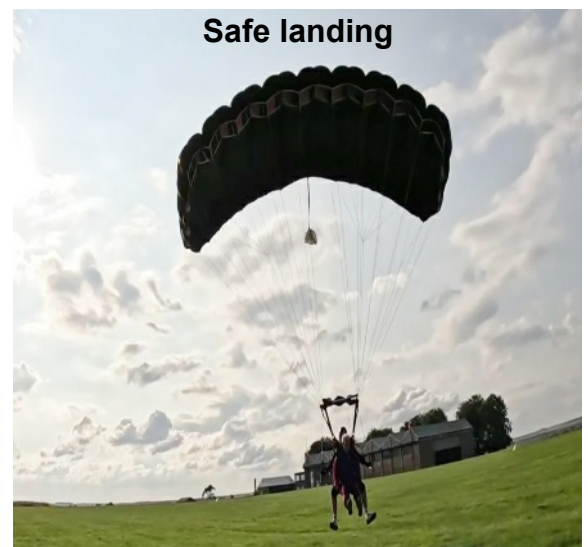
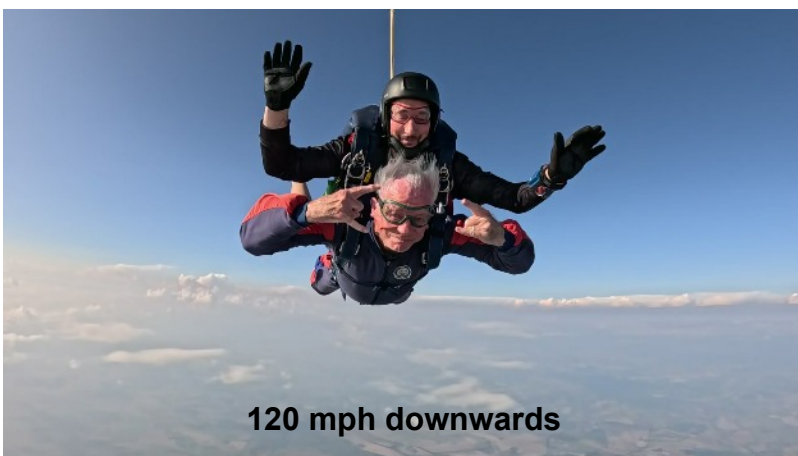
SKYDIVE 2024

Well the 21st of September 2024 had arrived at last, which coincidentally is the 80th anniversary of one of the major WW2 parachute drops at Arnhem in 1944, and Stacy Wood, Steve Mullis and myself (Graham Croft) reported for duty at Netheravon for our RAFA Wings Appeal Skydive. After a week of glorious weather our day has not started according to plan as it is windy, dark low clouds horizon to horizon, and the forecast of possible thunderstorms. We were given a 'Briefing' that started "Welcome to British Skydiving" !!! Two basic requirements for a skydive to go ahead are that it could not be too windy and it must be possible to see the ground from the aircraft at 13,000 feet.

By about 2.00 pm it seemed really unlikely that any flights would take place and many people decided to reschedule there skydive and they left for home. I would have done the same except that I was booked in at a local hotel so I stayed and prayed.

So it was Cheese Toastie and Coffee time in the hangar café and by some miracle in just the 30 minutes it took the wind dropped and the sky cleared.

First a briefing in the hanger and a check that you can bend and stretch into the required freefall and landing positions. Get kitted up, which was a very safety conscious procedure, and then wait to be called out to the aircraft. The next half hour is very adrenalin driven; Pack into the aircraft, take off and climb to 13,000 feet (OMG that is over 2 miles high), green light and door opens, shuffle into doorway and exit into the sky. The small drogue parachute reduces the freefall speed to about 120 mph then the main parachute is opened at 6,000 feet. This is quite a rapid deceleration and one has to be sure one's 'family jewels' are not located anywhere close to the harness. It is now about 5 minutes of sedate circling descent and then the ground seems to be approaching rather quickly. Soft and safe landing though followed by a huge adrenaline 'high'. It was so much fun and thanks to some of you generous people I managed to raise over £600 for RAFA



CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS

Phew!!! Time for a sit down I think and to try to get my brain in gear to give our Newsletter Editor, aka Clive "Give me more" Simpson, my three-monthly ramblings.

So here goes. The last weekend has just been a tad manic. Friday saw the setting up of the branch gazebo at the old RAF Abingdon for their Air Show the next day. On Saturday it was a trip to Netheravon to meet up with Graham Croft & Tracey Wood to do our Tandem Skydive. Suspect weather for most of the day saw only Graham complete his jump but I will leave him to do the full review of the day. By 15.00 hrs on the Saturday saw me back with our team of helpers at Abingdon for the last couple of hours before dismantling everything & taking it home. Sunday was spent sorting out all the Wings stock to get it stored away until 2025, sorting out the votes from the branch members reference the Annual Conference resolutions plus arranging two Zoom meetings on the subject for the next weekend.

These will have happened by the time you read this, so I hope that they were helpful for those who joined me. There is still time to send me your votes if you haven't already. I cannot stress how important this year's Annual Conference is, and therefore your opinions on these 15 resolutions that have been sent to all Primary members of the branch. The result of the voting on these resolutions will certainly shape the way the Association moves forward in the future.

Please remember it is **YOUR** Association and **YOUR** vote is important!!! At the Annual Conference in October, Marilyn Roman will rightly be receiving her National Presidential Certificate. Enjoy the weekend, Marilyn!! Work is also moving apace on our AGM 2025 being held in Benalmadena, Spain. Coaches have been booked for our day trips to RAF Gibraltar, Ronda & our Act of Remembrance at the 4 Commonwealth War Graves at St George's Church in Malaga. An amazing week is assured, hopefully, for 30+ branch members breaking new ground with the branch holding its first ever overseas AGM. There is still time to join us should you wish. Just email me for details!!!!

New on the Chairman's jobs to do list is the Global Branch 10th Anniversary Dinner Dance which I hope to give many details about in my next ramblings. Suffice to say that the event will be held in September 2025, date to be confirmed, and it will be a return to the birthplace of the branch, Newbury, Berkshire. Details of Hotel's, plus possibly different packages will hopefully also be in place. That's all for this month folks!!!!

HASTA LA VISTA

FUND RAISING SUGGESTIONS.

Helping Global Branch 1370 to support the RAFA 'Wings Appeal' is something we can all do, at a time that suits us and in a method that we feel comfortable with. I am here to arrange, advise and support for any of the methods you choose.

The simplest way is to spend a few hours in the entrance of your local store; Tesco, Morrisons etc, with an official collecting tin (which is made of plastic of course). You will need to make an initial approach to the store Manager to arrange a suitable date and then let me know. I will send you the collecting tin and a copy of the RAFA Insurance that will cover you on the day. After the event you pay the money into the Group 'Wings Appeal' Bank Account and let me know how you got on. A picture on our Facebook page would be good too. Marilyn Spaeth has found this method very worthwhile, raising £120 this year.



The method I use is to have a 'table' at our Village events with a selection of items to exchange for donations, plus some free "give away's". These events usually last about 4 hours, are inside, allow you to have lots of chat and banter, and most importantly there will be lots of tea/coffee/cakes. You will need to arrange your booking and then let me know the date (for the insurance), I can then send you a selection of RAFA trade items, which I can help you choose if you prefer, plus freebies and a 'T' Shirt if you would like one. In the days following the event you will need to let me know how you have done, pay the funds into the Group 'Wings Appeal' Bank Account, post a picture on our Facebook page, and store away any unsold items for next time.



Display board of Aircraft pins.



It makes some sense to see if there are any other Group Members living in your vicinity by just asking on our Facebook page. In this way you can share the fun and even be a bit more ambitious and attend larger events, as Steve Mullis and 'Spike' Elliot do with great success.

It is now up to you and I know I keep saying it but "it is easy and great fun".

THE FORGOTTEN BOMBER OF WWII

The ultimate heavy bomber of the Second World War was undoubtedly the Avro Lancaster, but RAF operations during the conflict were not limited to one four-engine aircraft, especially as the Lancaster only carried out its inaugural operation in March 1942, two years and six months into the conflict.



7 Squadron Stirling at RAF Leeming

It was the lesser-known Short Stirling that bore the brunt of bombing missions for almost two years before the Lancaster emerged, the first four-engine bomber to enter RAF service in August 1940 when it was delivered to No. 7 Squadron at Leeming.

It was, however, another six months before it undertook operational duty, its first combat mission on the night of February 10, 1941, hitting fuel storage tanks near Rotterdam in the German-occupied Netherlands – frontline missions lasting little more than two years before its bombing duties passed to the Handley Page

Halifax and the Lancaster.

It was the late 1930's when the British military started looking beyond twin-engine bombers, the Air Ministry publishing Specification B.12/36 – a requirement for a high-speed, four-engine strategic bomber capable of a range of 2,000 miles at a cruising speed in excess around 250 mph at 15,000 ft, carrying a maximum payload of 14,000 lbs.

The specification was initially sent to Supermarine, Boulton Paul. Handley Page and Armstrong Whitworth, Shorts only later added to the list of aircraft companies when it became clear the firm already possessed designs in-house akin to what was required; at that time Shorts were producing four-engine boat designs including the S.25 Sunderland.

The initial decision was to hand the order to Supermarine, with Shorts as back-up, but following an alteration in the requirements for the new aircraft and the death of

Supermarine designer Reginald Mitchell, prototypes were ordered from Shorts and Supermarine.

Shorts developed the S.29 as a derivative of the Sunderland, with a shortened wingspan to fit the new aircraft into existing hangars, June 1937 seeing the S.29 prototype accepted by the Air Ministry, along with Supermarine's Type 317.

While Shorts also continued to develop the S.31 – based on the Empire flying boat – with a prototype flown to RAF Martlesham Heath in October 1938 to be evaluated by the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment (AAEE), the Air Ministry had their eyes on the S.29, with an order placed ahead of any prototype as concerns grew over the increasing strength of the Luftwaffe.

It was May 14, 1939 that the first S.29 performed a test flight from the firm's Rochester aerodrome in Kent, the success of which was countered by an accident on landing when the brakes locked causing the aircraft to spin off the runway and the landing gear to collapse.



Aircrew in front of Short Stirling Mark I, N3676 of No. 1651 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Waterbeach

Despite the prototype being written off, changes to the undercarriage design were accepted, a second prototype taking off on December 3, 1939, just a few weeks after war had been declared, the aircraft already named after the Scottish city. This, however, was also far from a complete success, one of its engines failing with the test flight conducted on the three remaining, the pressures of war seemingly allowing for any deficiencies in design to

effectively be ignored with an upgrade on the Hampden and Whitley medium bombers desperately needed.

With the initial order of 100 now increased to 1500, production was expanded to Shorts' Belfast plant along with Austin's Longbridge car factory, and at its peak 20 sites were producing parts for the new aircraft.

The pace of the Stirling's development suffered in 1940 by the focus switching to restock the RAF fighters and twin-engine aircraft lost during the Battle of Britain, and by damage to Rochester: on August 15, 1940, a wing of Dornier 17's hit the Kent

factory and its aerodrome with 100 lb bombs, a number of completed Stirlings destroyed on the ground, with production set back by around a year. Development was then focused in Belfast along with a number of satellite firms, production of Stirlings also moving across the Atlantic in 1941 to Canada.

August 1940 also saw the first delivery of Stirlings to RAF Leeming, No. 7 Squadron beginning a four-month working-up programme, operational status achieved in January 1941 with active missions beginning in February.

Short Stirling of No. 1651 Heavy Conversion Unit being loaded with bombs.



With Shorts ahead of Supermarine in development of a four-engine bomber, Supermarine's work on Type 317 continued until September 26, 1940 when their Southampton factory was bombed, the two prototypes and construction plans lost with the Air Ministry cancelling the 317 project officially in November 1940.

By the end of 1941, more than 150 Stirlings were completed with three squadrons equipped, the aircraft undertaking day and night operations, the bomber also playing a pioneering role in the formation of the Pathfinder squadrons, navigation and target-finding units that assisted bombing missions.

While the Stirling was impressive in its handling and its ability to outmanoeuvre Luftwaffe night fighters, its performance at high altitudes was disappointing, many

mission conducted as low as 12,000 ft, meaning other RAF bombers could fly higher with the Luftwaffe focusing their attention on the Stirlings.

Another problem was that with a maximum bomb load its range could be as low as 600 miles, so raids into Italy or Germany were conducted with reduced payloads, sometimes the same as what medium bombers like the Wellington could carry. The design of the bomb bay also meant that the bigger incendiary devices being created at the time could not be carried, and by late 1943 the Lancaster and Halifax had overtaken the Stirling in importance to the military – by November 1943, the Stirling was withdrawn from frontline service.

For the remainder of the war, the Stirling was reduced to secondary missions including mine laying and glider towing, its bombing role ending with a record of 14,500 sorties

flown and 582 aircraft being lost in action. From 1944, a Stirling Mk V was being produced for transport duties, but they were being phased out shortly after the end of the war, several sold to a Belgian firm for charter flights, with Egypt also buying a number which saw action during the 1948 Arab Israeli War.



In April 1942 214 Squadron converted to Stirlings. It is little known, but the nucleus of the recently re-forming 215 Squadron destined for the Middle East, was to a large extent, made up from experienced crews pulled away from 214 Squadron beginning sometime in the autumn of 1941 and continuing until the spring of 1942.

In Oct 1942 214 Squadron moved to Chedburgh then on to Downham Market in Dec 1943, continuing with Stirlings until January 1944 when its tour of duty with No. 3 Group ended. The squadron was later transferred to No. 100 (Bomber Support) Group where it was subsequently re-equipped with American Flying Fortress aircraft. Here it was engaged in radio counter-measures (detection and jamming of enemy radio and radar equipment) until May of 1945.

LET'S 'AV A LARF

When one door closes and another door opens, you are probably in prison.

To me, "drink responsibly" means don't spill it.

Age 60 might be the new 40, but 9:00 pm is the new midnight.

It's the start of a brand new day, and I'm off like a herd of turtles.

The older I get, the earlier it gets late.

When I say, "The other day," I could be referring to any time between yesterday and 15 years ago.

I remember being able to get up without making sound effects.

I had my patience tested. I'm negative.

Remember, if you lose a sock in the dryer, it comes back as a Tupperware lid that doesn't fit any of your containers.

If you're sitting in public and a stranger takes the seat next to you, just stare straight ahead and say, "Did you bring the money?"

When you ask me what I am doing today, and I say "nothing," it does not mean I am free. It means I am doing nothing.

I finally got eight hours of sleep. It took me three days, but whatever.

I run like the winded.

I hate when a couple argues in public, and I missed the beginning and don't know whose side I'm on.

When someone asks what I did over the weekend, I squint and ask, "Why, what did you hear?"

When you do squats, are your knees supposed to sound like a goat chewing on an aluminium can stuffed with celery?

I don't mean to interrupt people. I just randomly remember things and get really excited.

When I ask for directions, please don't use words like "East."

Don't bother walking a mile in my shoes. That would be boring. Spend 30 seconds in my head. That'll freak you right out.

Sometimes, someone unexpected comes into your life out of nowhere, makes your heart race, and changes you forever. We call those people cops.

My luck is like a bald guy who just won a comb."

