

AIRmail

Keeping you informed

80th Anniversary

Autumn 2024 • rafa.org.uk

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The charity that supports the RAF family

FORCES FOR GOOD

Supporting operations
and saving lives: the vital
role of volunteers

FEATURES

How RAF reservist roles
have evolved to tackle
emerging threats

NEWS

Thousands receive
support from RAFA
outreach campaign

FUNDRAISING

Going underground:
London Tube Challenge
world record attempt

AND MORE

Updates from the RAF
and the latest news
from your branch

*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



really, ~~all good~~" do much!

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Red over black

The Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team in formation over Blackpool beachfront during the Blackpool Airshow in August. The Red Arrows, who marked their 60th anniversary in 2024, had a busy summer season with events across the UK, including a flypast over Buckingham Palace to mark the official birthday of His Majesty The King. Trips were also made to France and Norway, before the team set off across the Atlantic for their tour of Canada.

 For more news from the RAF see pages 20-21



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A member of an RAF Mountain Rescue Team practises procedures and drills in the Cairngorms mountain range, Scotland.

© MOD/Crown

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CONTACT YOUR ASSOCIATION

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For any enquiries about your membership of the Royal Air Forces Association, to volunteer or get support, use the contacts below:

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For 24/7 access to your Members' Portal, which also contains a digital version of this magazine.

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Talking Air Mail

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"Each team member must implicitly trust their colleagues in every situation"



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“Our own force multiplier”

2024 marks 100 years of Volunteer Reserve Service in the Royal Air Force. This began with the establishment of the Auxiliary Air Force (AAF) in 1924, followed by the RAF Volunteer Reserve in 1938-1939. This was done to give civilians the opportunity to contribute to the defence of Britain and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force has been supporting the operational work of the RAF ever since.

From medical and media, to intelligence and cyber units, the Royal Auxiliary Air Force provides highly specialised support to the RAF, support that complements and enhances our Regular service elements.



© Phil Greig

Air Marshal Sir Baz North,
President of the RAF Association

I have had the privilege to work closely with many of our Reserve personnel on both operations from the Falklands to Afghanistan and on exercises from the UK to Albania. Indeed, it has been my honour to have served as the Honorary Air Officer of 2503 Squadron since 2016; the Squadron’s focus is on Force Protection and it provides RAF Regiment and RAF Police security support at RAF Waddington, its home base, and at locations across the Globe through individual mobilisation.

In a similar way, it is the collective might of our own 6,000-strong network of RAFA volunteers that is the key to our ability to deliver the breadth and scale of work that we do. This team of dedicated, highly-trained volunteers acts as our own force multiplier, without whom we simply could not have the same impact.

Practically speaking, our volunteer field force means that we can help thousands, rather than hundreds, in myriad ways: building and maintaining connections within their local networks and across the RAF community, providing practical support and access to specialist services and advice.

As well as helping those who are already experiencing acute need, our volunteers also play a vital role in the work we do to try and prevent people from reaching crisis point. In June this year, volunteers from across the RAF community joined us in making more than 2,200 wellbeing calls to RAF veterans and their families. One in five of those whom we called were referred to one of our welfare services, people who otherwise would not have asked for our help.

There can be no doubt as to the impact that our volunteers have: it is transformational. Thank you to all who volunteer your time, in whatever way, to support the aims and the work of the RAF Association. **A**

AIR MARSHAL SIR BAZ NORTH, PRESIDENT

news

● **IN THIS SECTION** Find the latest news from the Association, including fundraising success, nationwide events and more ways you can get involved



TURN TO PAGE 32

We spoke to Reserves who have joined Op Biloxi, to mark 100 years of RAF volunteers

OUTREACH

Reaching out to thousands

2024 outreach campaign discovers veteran who hadn't spoken to another person for a month

AS PART of the RAF Association's national outreach campaign to mark Armed Forces Day (29 June), volunteers, ambassadors and serving RAF personnel joined staff and branch members to make thousands of calls to members of the RAF community all over the world – to check in on their wellbeing and to arrange further support if needed.

One volunteer commented: "I have been truly humbled by my experience supporting the Association's outreach campaign today. Having spoken to seven wonderful 'old boys', one of whom hadn't spoken to anybody (not even a postman or a neighbour) for over a month, it proved to me how easy it is to make a difference – small, yes, but impactful nevertheless."

Not only are veterans less likely than those without military backgrounds to approach charities for support, RAF veterans are more likely to live alone than other adults within the wider UK population, making them even more vulnerable.

Over the past year, the Association has continued to see an increase in the number of people seeking urgent financial assistance and the rising cost of living has also increased the number of older adults experiencing loneliness and isolation.



RAF referee Lauren Impey making calls to check on the welfare of people in the RAF community

Rory O'Connor, Charity Director at the RAF Association, said: "The power of a simple phone call cannot be underestimated. It can make a huge positive difference to an individual's wellbeing. Our outreach campaign is vital and enables us to reach those in the RAF community who may need our support. Our volunteers have been speaking to people struggling with a range of issues, such as bereavement, life-changing injuries or financial difficulties. Thanks to the calls from our volunteers, they are now receiving the help and support they need and deserve."

Organisations that took part were: new supporters Fraser Nash Consultancy, KBR, and 2Excel. Previous supporters who returned to help again were: April Fools Club, Babcock, Fujitsu, Inzpire, MBDA, Northrup Grumman, Qinetiq, Raytheon, and Verizon.

RAFAKIDZ

RAFAKidz sees success at awards

Congratulations to RAFAKidz, which was Highly Commended in the national Nursery World Nursery Group of the Year award, and also to RAFAKidz Cranwell, which won Nursery of the Year at the same event.

The winners were announced at the awards evening in London on 21 September.

The opening of RAFAKidz Valley on 2 September brought the number of nurseries and after-school clubs in the group to 17. They are located across England and designed to meet the needs of military and civilian families in the community on and around RAF stations, and to provide affordable and quality childcare.



NEWS

Support for Op Telic and Herrick RAF veterans

A free mental wellbeing course targeted at those who served in the RAF on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan was launched this summer.

Under Op RAF Unite, which aims to bring together veterans of Ops Herrick and Telic and raise awareness of the support available to them, the RAF Association and the RAF Benevolent Fund have developed a bespoke package of wellbeing support for veterans of the conflicts.

The RAF Association will deliver a bespoke version of its Finding it Tough? training, tailored for veterans of Ops Herrick and Telic, which provides guidance on mental wellbeing and resilience as well as offering practical tips and habits to support others.

Wellbeing Services Officer, Charlotte

Marlow, who leads the delivery of the project at the RAF Association, said: "We believe that approximately 37,000 RAF personnel served on Operations Herrick and Telic. Research by the Forces in Mind Trust suggests 80% of these veterans are not in contact with any association or service charity. It is important for us to provide support for these younger veterans and make sure they are OK. There may be as many as 30,000 current and former personnel who could benefit from this course."

RAF veterans of Ops Herrick and Telic will also benefit from the Op Unite Listening and Counselling Service helpline, managed by the RAF Benevolent Fund, where they can talk to professional counsellors and get confidential support.

OP RAF UNITE



51 Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment carrying out a routine foot patrol in their area of operation to the south of Camp Bastion, Afghanistan in 2012

© MOD/Crown

SURVEY

Volunteering survey findings

Volunteering is vital for the Association and good for the volunteers themselves

RAF Association volunteers feel valued and really appreciate the training they receive, according to new research findings. A phenomenal 97 per cent of the Association's volunteers rated their volunteering experience with the charity as 'good' or 'very good'. The findings, from the Volunteer Engagement Evaluation Report, were presented to the Association's Welfare Committee in July 2024.

The research looked at RAF Association Connections for Life, casework and outreach volunteers. Common motivators included 'wanting to help others' and 'wanting to make a difference'. RAF Association Connections for Life volunteers tended

to be motivated by their previous service in the RAF and outreach volunteers were motivated by their current work alongside serving or veteran RAF personnel.

The Association is the sole military charity providing accredited training for welfare/wellbeing volunteers that is recognised by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group.

All three volunteer cohorts reported gaining a sense of personal achievement and feeling valued. RAF Association Connections for Life volunteers also gain a sense of connection to others, and casework volunteers experience improved wellbeing.

The report's researchers had also been asked to work out the economic value of the volunteers (how much their services would cost if provided by paid employees) and placed their annual contribution to the Association at around £815,000 a year.

Laura Holding, Head of Research and Evaluation at the RAF Association, said: "The Association could not deliver its vital services for the RAF community so well without our amazing volunteers, and we thank them all for giving their time. The data and insight from the report will now be used across the Association to improve the future of the volunteering network and the experience of our volunteers."



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quality time
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a family.”**

- Al Dyer



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Taking in the course sights during RAFA Rides Brize Norton



Pride and friendship at RAFA Rides Kendrew Barracks

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FUNDRAISING

Record number of riders at RAFA Rides 2024

In June, a record 1,900 cyclists came together to support the Royal Air Force community at the RAF Association’s annual global cycling event, RAFA Rides. Organised rides took place at Kendrew Barracks (formerly RAF Cottesmore), RAF Marham and RAF Brize Norton.

Participants were also able to take part virtually through RAFA Rides Your Way. Hundreds of people from all over the world, from Canada to Australia and Qatar, joined the thousands of cyclists tackling the RAFA Rides routes.

The Association’s Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Rachel Huxford, said: “What I love about RAFA Rides is seeing how it brings people together – people who may not have seen each other for the rest of the year – to cycle together and challenge themselves. Every year we see people meeting old friends and making new ones, all the while backing our vital work to support the RAF community.”

Stephen Poulton, a 77-year-old RAF veteran and former cycling world record holder, said: “I was stationed at RAF Brize Norton for two years, so taking part in the RAFA Rides event there felt natural. It was a chance to challenge my fitness and support RAFA. It was a very enjoyable event.”

Since the first event in 2018, RAFA Rides has been a key event in the military charity cycling calendar, connecting RAF personnel and supporters from around the world with one ambition: to support the RAF community.

The events were made possible thanks to the generous support of the Association’s sponsors: Lockheed Martin UK; Lone Star UK; PLEXSYS; Raytheon UK; Boeing Defence UK; LifeJacket Skin Protection; Top Aces; Inzpire; ERDINGER Alkoholfrei; Serco (Brize Norton).

Spot riders you know in our galleries: rafa.org.uk/marham24; rafa.org.uk/brize24; rafa.org.uk/kendrew24

NEWS

“And with videos. Magic!”

In July, *Air Mail* readers were sent two versions of this magazine. The paper version was posted as usual, but a digital version was also sent to readers for whom the Association has an email address.

Reactions from members who loved the development ranged from: “This is a brilliant idea” to “Outstanding innovation” and “I am very impressed with this new version, which is so easy to read – and with videos, magic!”

Concerns were also raised, from: “What, no hard copy?”

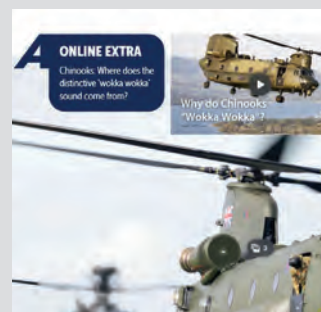
(Absolutely not, the digital version just arrives before the paper copy); to “Thank you but I want a proper magazine”.

Two versions of *Air Mail* will be sent out to anyone who has not yet expressed a preference. Recipients can choose what format suits them: paper only, digital only, or both.

Natasha Glenville, Head of Corporate Communications at the Association, said: “We are determined to provide the magazine in a modern format that can easily follow deployed

and other RAFA members around the world as well as offering additional content such as video, extra image galleries and links to other similar stories. Many people do prefer the physical version of the magazine, and we want to be clear that we are committed to providing both a print and digital version in the future.”

Subscribers are encouraged to let the Association HQ team know what works best for you. If you’d like the digital version but have not provided your email, please do so via the Members’ Portal, or call 0800 018 2361.



The digital version of *Air Mail* includes extra content





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NEWS

Area President applauds Welfare Region

For the first time in living memory, an Area President's Cup has been awarded to a team from the RAF Association's headquarters. At the May 2024 South East Area Conference, Air Commodore Allan Vaughan, Area President, awarded his Area President's Trophy for 2023 to Welfare Region East.

The team was recognised for its 'outstanding and enduring performance'. Allan's citation said: "Despite being a new staff team under new leadership, Welfare Region East has established a robust team ethic.

"Through innovation and tireless engagement, the team has created supportive relationships with branch welfare officers, casework volunteers and other stakeholders, and has facilitated the largest number of welfare cases and enquiries of all the welfare regions in 2023.

"Team members conducted visits with beneficiaries, when necessary, to cover gaps in our volunteer network coverage. They have led from the front with new strategies to reach out to, re-energise and encourage inactive volunteers and to offer improved personal support.

"The Welfare Region East Team demonstrates that operating with appropriate urgency and 'owning the outcome' are key to its core behaviours and the delivery of timely and appropriate support to those members of our community who are in such desperate need."



© RAF Association

Michelle Taylor, Senior Casework Manager (centre), and the Welfare Region East team celebrate with the South East Area President's Cup

© Personal collection



Dick Skepper sent this photo to say thank you to the hundreds of people who sent their good wishes.

NEWS

Birthday wishes from across the globe

Well-wishers from all over the world marked the 100th birthday of an RAF veteran with hundreds of birthday cards.

Richard 'Dick' Skepper received more than 1,000 birthday cards following an appeal by the RAF Association to mark his birthday.

Dick's son David said: "Dad received cards from children as young as six months old to people in their late nineties. They came from Australia, North and South America and various European countries as well as the United Kingdom. He was touched by the number of people who had taken the time to send a card, make artworks and thank him for his service during his time in the RAF."

Dick was born on 30 June 1924 in Kent. When the Second World War began, Dick wanted to be a tank driver, but his mother persuaded him to join the RAF. He completed his training in October 1942 and was posted to 99 Maintenance Unit (99MU) based at RAF High Ercall in Shropshire. He was then deployed to No 4 School

of Technical Training RAFT in Wales and qualified as a Flight Mechanic Engines (FM1) in February 1943.

He was posted to 7 Squadron under Bomber Command at RAF Oakington in Cambridgeshire in March 1943. He was given the rank of Aircraftman 1st class (AC1) in December 1943 and was promoted to Leading Aircraftman (LAC) in December 1944.

Dick married Irene in June 1945 and they had a son, David. They become grandparents to David's two children in their sixties. Dick and Irene spent their last year together living in Kinton Manor Nursing Home so they could be closer to their son David, his wife Lorraine and their children. Irene passed away in August 2018.

After the war, Dick worked at Vauxhall Motors, Roots/Chrysler and Dodge/Renault Trucks. He retired in 1988.

Dick celebrated his birthday at the end of June with a garden party at his nursing home, surrounded by family and friends.

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NEWS

Top level referee joins Association ambassadors

The RAF Association has a new ambassador, Corporal Lauren Impey, who joins the 15 ambassadors already helping to support the RAF Association's work.

She said: "I am proud to be an RAF Association ambassador and support the work they are doing for the RAF, which includes supporting serving, ex-serving, and family members. I visited RAF Association HQ on Armed Forces Day 2024, and experienced first-hand just how much its staff care about RAF serving personnel, RAF veterans and their families. I look forward to helping in any way I can."

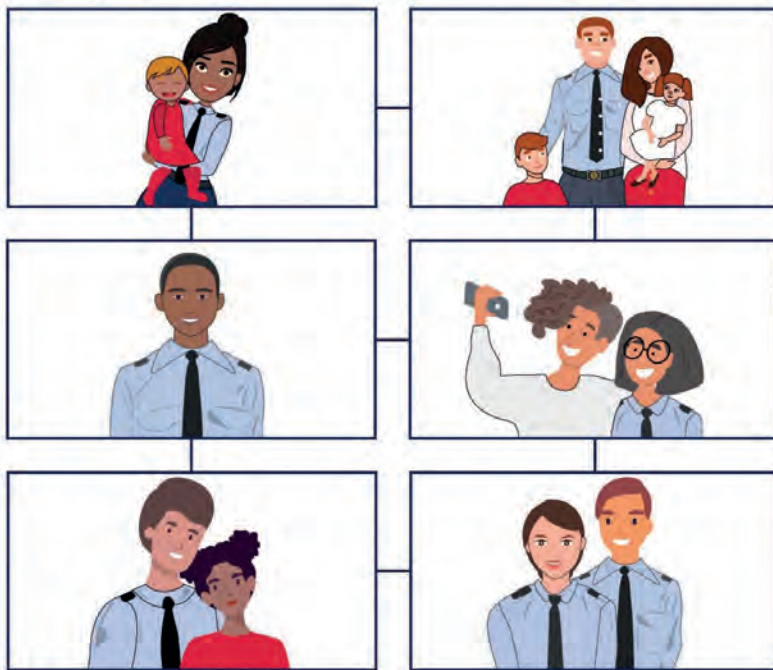
Lauren joined the RAF as a physical training instructor in 2017. She was named UK Armed Forces Match Official of the Year in 2023 and awarded RAF Elite Athlete status. She is a match official in women's and men's professional football, refereeing matches in the Women's Super League, English Football League, National League and Premier League 2.

She returned to service in July 2024 and is training to become an exercise rehabilitation instructor.



Corporal Impey waiting in the tunnel to officiate at a professional match

© FA



© RAF Families Federation

NEWS

Representing ALL in the RAF community

The RAF Families Federation is appealing for all members of the RAF to contact them for support, and to make sure the voices of serving personnel are being heard by the RAF's chain of command.

The Federation exists to support and advise serving personnel and their families with unresolved issues that are caused by, or a direct result from, serving in the RAF.

Tim Unwin, Communications Manager at the Federation says: "Our team of specialists can offer this assistance

with problems related to service accommodation, schooling and school places, SEND provision or childcare, guidance for anyone who may be undergoing trying times financially, experiencing health-related concerns, trying to find employment for spouses and partners, and many more areas.

"The Wittering-based team collects anonymised data and evidence from reported cases and compiles reports for the chain of command and UK government that highlight any areas of

concern within the organisation that need addressing. It frequently lobbies for change in policy to improve the lives of the RAF 'family'."

All members of the RAF – single, married or in a long-term relationship, full-time and Reserves – can contact the Federation for support.

www.raf-ff.org.uk/contact or telephone 01780 781650.


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Aviators from the Royal Air Force Music Service and the King's Colour Squadron proudly paraded in a rare RAF Dual Mount at Buckingham Palace to mark the centenary of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force

© MOD Crown

NEWS

Celebrating 100 years of Reserves

The King's Colour Squadron and colour parties from nine Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF) squadrons celebrated 100 years of volunteer Reserve service in the RAF by taking part in a unique parade in May.

Standards were paraded before His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester (Honorary Air Commodore in Chief of the RAuxAF), followed by the Squadron Standards of 502 (Ulster) Squadron, 600 (City of London) Squadron, 601 (County of London) Squadron, 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron, 605 (County of Warwickshire) Squadron, 2503 (City of Lincoln) Squadron, 2620 (County of Norfolk) Squadron, 2622 (Highland) Squadron, 2623 (East Anglian) Squadron, and led by the Band of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force from RAF Cranwell.

A new musical composition was also commissioned and composed to

mark the achievements of the past 100 years and to give the RAuxAF its very own march. Called *Comitamur*, the march was recorded by Royal Air Force musicians at RAF Cranwell. The title comes from the motto of the RAuxAF, *Comitamur ad Astra* – we go with them to the stars.

Composer, Squadron Leader Sellers, director of music of the band of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, said: "It has been an honour to write this march at such an important time in the history of our service. When the RAuxAF was formed its members were flying bi-planes. Now the RAuxAF is recruiting people from civilian life to serve in the RAF's Reserve space and cyber flights and this march celebrates the journey the RAuxAF has come on."

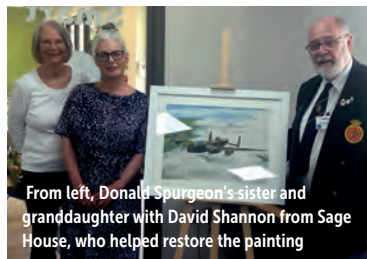
Read more about the RAuxAF and the role of volunteers in the RAF in our features this issue, from page 26.

NEWS

Painting's perfect home

A painting of a Lancaster bomber by Squadron Leader CE Pratt DFC now hangs at RAFA Housing Storrington thanks to the generosity of a West Sussex family.

Abigail Spurgeon had found the artwork in a charity shop and given it to her grandfather, Donald Henry Spurgeon, who served in the RAF. On his death, Abigail wanted to pass it on to somewhere with a Royal Air Force connection. She approached Sage House Dementia Unit in Tangmere to have the painting restored, and they suggested giving it to RAFA Housing Ltd, who were delighted to accept it. Storrington residents visited Sage House for the formal presentation and to meet members of Donald's family.



From left, Donald Spurgeon's sister and granddaughter with David Shannon from Sage House, who helped restore the painting

© Sage House Dementia Support

NEWS

Lindgren bust to go on display

An honorary treasurer of the RAF Association, who helped it flourish in its early years, will be remembered at Atlas House.

Frederick 'Freddie' Lindgren OBE was a chartered accountant who served in the RAF Volunteer Reserve training branch. After demobbing he became responsible for the finances of the Association from 1946 to 1952 and in 1964.

Sixty years later, Freddie's daughter Sylvia Reid has donated a bronze bust of him to the Association. It had been commissioned from a New Zealand sculptor by Freddie's wife and his daughter wanted it to belong to the organisation with which he was so strongly associated.

Freddie was awarded his OBE as part of Queen Elizabeth II's Birthday Honours in June 1967 as "Honorary Treasurer for the RAF Association". An *Air Mail* news item from August 1967 said: "It was due to his wise counsel and professional skill that the Association's financial structure was built on a sound and firm foundation."

Visitors to Atlas House will be able to see the bust in the Volant Suite.



Daughter Sylvia Reid at home with the bust of her father, Freddie Lindgren OBE

© Sylvia Reid



Aircraft and personnel gathered at RAF Leeming for Exercise Hades Warrior



Star Wars

UK Space Command has hosted the UK's first space wargame, Exercise Space Warrior, at the Defence Experimentation and Wargaming Hub in Hampshire.

The wargame explored how commercial space-based Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) can work alongside Defence's own space-based ISR capabilities, such as Programme ISTARI, which will deliver a constellation of defence satellites for space-based ISR by 2031.

Since its formation in 2021, UK Space Command personnel have taken part in exercises and wargames in the UK and Europe, the US, and the Indo-Pacific region. Space Warrior is expected to be a regular UK Space Command wargame that will help to build relationships and understanding between UK Space Command allies, partners, and industry.

Exercise Hades Warrior

HELICOPTERS FROM ACROSS the Joint Aviation Command (JAC) came together at RAF Leeming to take part in the first Exercise Hades Warrior under Aviation Task Force (Support Helicopter) Headquarters.

Bringing together aircraft and personnel from across the JAC, Exercise Hades Warrior comprised aircraft from across the country, including Apache from 7 Army Air Corps, Chinook from 27 Squadron RAF Odiham, Merlin from the Commando Helicopter Force, and Wildcat from 847 Naval Air Squadron.

The exercise saw more than 200 pilots, aircrew, and ground support staff deployed to RAF Leeming over a two-week period, running daily flying sorties across the north of England and into Scotland.

Operating from the north also provided important opportunities to work with British Army units based locally. With limited exposure to each

other on a day-to-day basis, helicopters were able to provide a number of sorties to infantry units.

Hades Warrior also brought together operational support units from across the armed forces. Tactical Supply Wing from MOD Stafford delivered more than 200,000kg of fuel to RAF Leeming, and also supplied non-established locations such as RAF Spadeadam.

The exercise provided a training opportunity for Aviation Task Force (Support Helicopter) personnel, allowing them to test their ability to rapidly deploy to austere locations before going into high readiness to provide humanitarian relief during hurricane season in the British Overseas Territories.



Don't forget to claim your discount!

Association members receive a discount on subscriptions to the RAF's fortnightly publication *RAF News*. Call **RAF News/Johnson Press** on **01293 312 191** or visit **rafa.org.uk/rafnews**. You will need to give your RAF Association membership number to subscribe.

Rim of the Pacific

The RAF has concluded its participation in the world's largest international maritime exercise: Exercise Rim of the Pacific 2024.

Two Poseidon MRA.1 maritime patrol aircraft flew 10,000 miles to Hawaii to participate in the exercise, which is on a scale and complexity unavailable anywhere else in the world.

With 29 nations, 40 surface ships, three submarines, and over 25,000 personnel, it provided a unique training opportunity and helped build and reinforce the international partnerships critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world's oceans.

The exercise was the longest detachment the Poseidon force has achieved to date, as well as being the greatest distance travelled. The main challenges included working with unfamiliar oceanographics and tracking targets not previously encountered.

Returning to Scotland, personnel from CXX and 201 Squadrons, the Poseidon Line Squadron and the Tactical Operations Centre resumed their role providing global protection to the UK, NATO and allied submarines and warships.



Exercise Rim of the Pacific 2024 gave opportunities for crucial training



Typhoons from the UK took part in Australian-led Exercise Pitch Black

Far side of the world

A UK detachment of six Typhoon aircraft from XI (F) Squadron, a Voyager from the Air Mobility Force and supporting elements from across the RAF have spent three weeks halfway around the world, taking part in Australian-led Exercise Pitch Black.

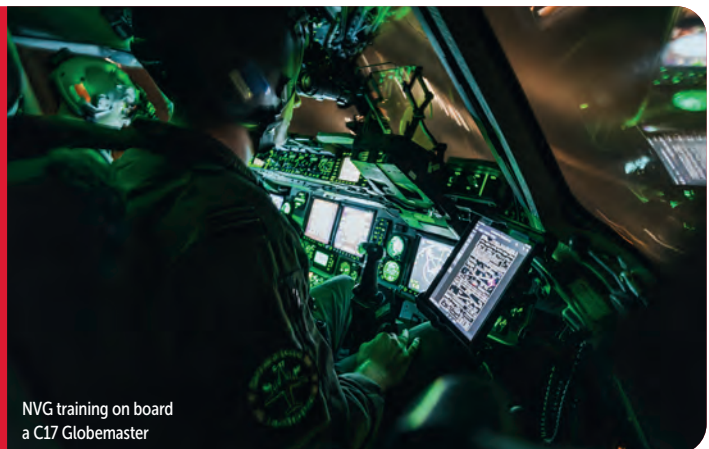
The exercise included simulated offensive counter air operations against another nation,

and air interdiction scenarios in a complex air environment. The overarching aim was to practise offensive and defensive air combat in an airspace larger than the UK.

During the exercise, the RAF detachment also worked alongside nations with whom the UK is building stronger relationships, including Japan, India and Papua New Guinea.

Going green

Aircrew from 99 Squadron have conducted night vision goggle (NVG) training on the C17 Globemaster. Departing from RAF Brize Norton, an instructor took pilots to a dark runway where only a small touch-down zone was marked with infrared lighting. As part of the training, personnel also completed tactical assault landings, go-arounds, taxiing, and reversing the aircraft under its own engine power based solely on the loadmaster's directional commentary – all in the pitch black while using NVGs.



NVG training on board a C17 Globemaster



Flour bombing at garden party raises thousands

Thank you to Ambassador and RAF Association Connections for Life volunteer Vic Norman, his wife Anne and all at AeroSuperBatics for their support. In June they hosted a garden party at RFC Rendcomb airfield, which raised more than £40,000.

Cate Driscoll, Head of Partnerships and Events at the Association, said: "The guests had a fabulous time at the event in Gloucestershire. We were very lucky with the weather so they were able to wing walk and take part in a flour bombing competition – where they dropped bags of flour from an open cockpit aircraft onto targets on the ground. Thanks to Vic and Anne and the generosity of our guests, the money raised will go towards the Association's Connections for Life and wellbeing projects."



Association President Air Marshal Sir Baz North presented flowers to Anne Norman to thank her and her husband Vic for hosting the event

London Tube Challenge

Life Vice President's Tube Challenge world record attempt put under pressure with just six weeks to go

JUST AS THIS issue of *Air Mail* went to print, Air Commodore Alan Opie and his friend Jonathan Pettit were attempting to break the world record for the London Tube Challenge. They were trying to visit all 272 stations on the London tube network, connecting between stations by tube, on foot or using other forms of public transport. They were not allowed to get a taxi or a lift.

Announcing their formal attempt in Spring 2024, Alan said: "In 2021, the Northern Line Tube Extension to Nine Elms added two more stations to the network and a new Guinness World Record of 20 hrs 4 mins 10 secs was set by Adham Fisher on 4 October 2021." However, in early July 2024, a group of eight teenagers was confirmed by Guinness World Records to have

knocked 1 hour and 56 minutes off the target time – changing it to 18 hours, 8 minutes and 13 seconds.

The August attempt is the second time Alan and Jonathan have taken on the Tube Challenge. Alan said: "In 2018, we tried to break the previous [shorter] world record of 15 hrs 45 mins 38 secs set in 2015 for visiting 270 stations. Despite major engineering problems closing the Jubilee Line for six hours, we managed to visit all bar one of the stations (Heathrow Terminal 4) in 19 hrs 15 mins – before the network closed.

"We are attempting it again to celebrate my retirement after 44 wonderful years serving in the RAF," he continued. "I am supporting the RAF Association." Jonathan, who works for the British Association of Landscape

964 miles cycled in 4.5hrs

At the request of Royal Air Force colleagues, a team from Babcock International created a Hades Diamond RAFA Rides challenge, asking co-workers across the UK to cycle 964 miles.

The staff from the defence, aerospace and security company took on the challenge as part of RAFA Rides Your Way. To raise the funds they collaborated with RAF service personnel and Ministry of Defence civil servants – all partners who work with

Babcock to provide Hades technical and support services to 18 RAF stations.

Seventeen people, on static bikes, covered the distance from the start point to the four most northerly, easterly, southerly and westerly Hades sites: RAF Boulmer, RAF Cranwell, RAF Valley and Army Air Corps Middle Wallop. The challenge was completed in four hours and 36 minutes and raised nearly £3,500 for the Association.



Left: Air Commodore Alan Opie, planning his 2024 Tube Challenge
Below: Alan, left, and his friend Jonathan Pettit taking on the Tube Challenge in 2018



Industries, will support its charity of the year, Thrive.

“The challenge requires a lot of planning, fitness, stamina and a good sense of humour and, as our last attempt demonstrated, plenty of luck to ensure that the tubes keep running.”

The pair broadcast their progress on the day on social media so please catch up with their journey, give your support and see how they did.

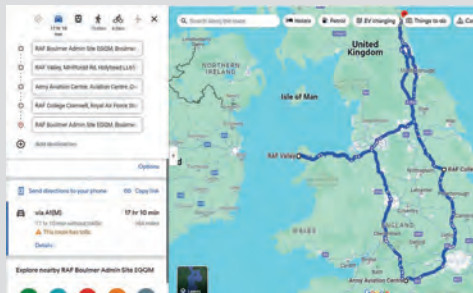
© RAF Association: © Alan Opie

JUST GIVING

Alan Opie is fundraising for The RAF Association (RAFA). His Just Giving page can be found at: rafa.org.uk/tubechallenge



Top: The Hades partners, going the distance as part of RAFA Rides Your Way
Right: The logistics – distances, times, totals



© Babcock

Gift A Challenge

Give someone you love a ‘money can’t buy’ experience this Christmas

YOU CAN GET your present-buying all wrapped up this Christmas with something a little different for your loved ones. Do you know someone who’s desperate to run a half marathon, but just can’t get a place in the ballot? What about your friend who’d love to do a tandem parachute jump with professional RAF skydivers? The RAF Association’s inspiring challenge events are now available as gifts.

If you gift an RAF Association challenge, you’ll help your friend or family member’s dreams come true while supporting a worthy cause. You can give any of the Association’s amazing run, fly, adventure or RAFA Rides cycling experiences coming up in 2025. The gift suits all pockets – pay for the registration only, and/or for part or all of the sponsorship. To find out more about how to Gift A Challenge, give an incredible memory to go with it, and give support to the Association at the same time, email: fundraising@rafa.org.uk.

Challenges available include: tandem skydiving, wingwalking, runs – from the London Landmarks Half to the Great North Run – RAFA Rides, and national and international treks and adventures.



A Do you know someone thinking about taking on a challenge? Or do you have a ballot place and want to support the RAF Association? Our fundraising team would love to hear from you and support your journey: fundraising@rafa.org.uk



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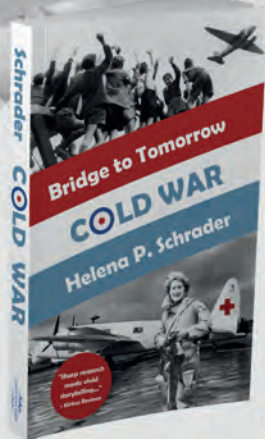
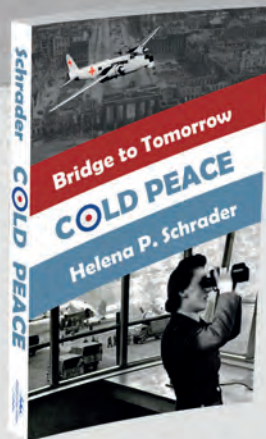
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“Here, I’ve got a life”

RAF veteran Ian Oldfield was living alone and at a very low ebb when he signed up to the RAF Association’s Connections for Life service. Little did he know the impact that decision would have



Top: Ian (left) and Rich still chat every few weeks, though Ian’s new schedule can make it difficult to find the time! (© RAF Association)

Above: Ian’s new home at Wexford House in Melton Mowbray (© Phil Greig)

Ian Oldham served in the RAF for 12 years between 1964 and 1976 in stores and air movements. A number of jobs in civilian life followed, with his final working role seeing him deliver parcels across the country.

“When retirement came along and old age crept up on me, I ended up on my own in a flat in Southampton,” says Ian. “My family were worried that I was sounding very low.”

Ian’s family put him in touch with Veterans’ Gateway, who referred him to the RAF Association.

“The RAF Association asked if I’d be interested in talking with someone from its Connections for Life service,” Ian continues. “I haven’t looked back since... It’s proved to be a godsend.”

Ian was paired with Rich Paul, who had recently become an RAF Association Connections for Life volunteer.

“I got a call from a private number,” says Ian, recalling that first conversation. “I don’t usually answer those, but Rich introduced himself and an hour later we were still talking. It was like we’d known each other for years.”

Having both served in the RAF, the pair were able to talk about service life

and their careers. It didn’t take long to discover other things they had in common: from rugby to politics to their families. “And we both like Portsmouth Football Club,” says Ian with a smile.

They spoke once a week for over an hour and during their conversations, Rich learned that Ian’s mobility issues were causing problems with shopping, and getting up and down the stairs to his apartment.

“Over time I built up a picture of where Ian was living, and it wasn’t really suitable,” says Rich. “The local authorities were trying to help but they were just overwhelmed.”

Rich arranged for Ian to have an assessment with one of the Association’s welfare team, who came to the same conclusion.

Knowing about the Association’s retirement accommodation, Rich broached the subject with Ian, who was soon booked in for a viewing at the Association’s Wexford House in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.

“I moved in in July 2023,” said Ian. “It only happened because Rich had picked up on things I’d said. Those weekly calls did a lot for me, they really did.”

“It’s wonderful,” Ian says of his new home. “I’m living with 10 like-minded people who all served in the RAF. I’ve only got to knock on a door and I’ve got someone to talk to, and vice-versa.”

“We have good food, a nice relaxed atmosphere; if we want to sit in the garden of an evening and have a glass of wine we can. Everybody is free and easy and we can go where we like.”

When asked how his life today at Wexford compares to 18 months ago, alone in Southampton, Ian says: “There, it was: wake up, shower, watch telly, go to bed. Here, I’ve got a life.” **A**

A Do you need support? Whether you need someone to talk to, help finding financial support, some time away to rest or something else entirely, we can help you find a solution. Find out more at rafa.org.uk/get-support

A PARTICULAR SET OF SKILLS

The role of the RAF Reserve has changed dramatically over the past 100 years. Now, the force recruits subject-matter experts as reservists to ensure the RAF can defend the UK and its allies against ever-evolving threats

“**P**eople think you join the military to run around with a gun and play at soldiers. The RAF has brought in people to do a job.” Flight Sergeant Neil, serving with 6 Cyber Reserve Squadron, is making a point about the highly specialised nature of the unit, but it also demonstrates the evolving role that Reserves have played in the history of the RAF.

This year marks 100 years of volunteer Reserve service in the RAF. Although ‘running around with a gun’ wasn’t exactly the requirement, members of the Auxiliary Air Force (AAF) saw frontline action not long after its formation. The AAF was established to give civilians the opportunity to learn to fly bi-planes and contribute to the defence of Britain and then, during 1938 and 1939 when the threat of war was growing, the RAF Volunteer Reserve was set up to quickly recruit large numbers of personnel.

Thousands of RAF Volunteer Reserves and members of the AAF lost their lives during the

war and, in 1947, His Majesty King George VI bestowed the prefix Royal on the service in recognition of their contribution. The Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF) still supports the RAF on operations, and today the force includes civilians from a range of backgrounds reflecting the changing needs of the RAF.

The right people for the job

What sets apart Neil and many of his colleagues on 6 Cyber Reserve is the manner of their recruitment. They were singled out as having critical skills and approached to consider joining the Reserves. Neil says: “In the early days, around 2013 or 2014, they started to target individuals – hackers, people on the cusp of breaking the law – and people like me who were looking at it in slightly different ways. The RAF was an early adopter of that kind of recruitment process.”

This ‘talent-first’ approach means that the squadron includes people with a wide variety of life experience. Flight Sergeant Dan, one >



6 CYBER RESERVE SQUADRON

6 Cyber Reserve Squadron falls under Operational Information Services Wing (OpISW Wg) of 90 Signals Unit based at RAF Leeming. Originally, the Cyber Reserves were embedded in 591 Signals Unit, which was formed in 1952 and is based at RAF Digby in Lincolnshire. In October 2021, 6 Cyber Reserve was separated as a distinct unit, also at RAF Digby, to provide the highest levels of cyber security expertise from the public and private sectors into the RAF. They also provide training to other squadrons to optimise the quality of personnel in digital defence against cyber threats.

of the earliest Cyber Reserve recruits who serves alongside Neil, believes that his lack of academic qualifications may have held him back from accessing traditional military roles. "I walked out of school with four GCSEs," he says. "If they were just going off academic credentials, I wouldn't be sitting in this role."

Dan, who is dyslexic and has ADHD, struggled at school but showed an early aptitude for cyber skills. "I started coding when I was eight years old and got myself in a bit of trouble when I was 13," he says. "I hacked a local supermarket to bring the sweets down to a ridiculously low price to sell them on at school. My father was the local police sergeant at the time, and I was dealt with appropriately."

Neil, in contrast, had a career spanning more than 30 years in law enforcement. "I'm Daniel's nemesis," he jokes. After 30 years as a police officer, eventually moving into surveillance and covert operations, in 2011 he joined the first ever National Cyber Crime Unit with the Metropolitan Police. He is now a senior operations manager overseeing teams that target serious and organised crime groups through their use of different technologies.

Widening the net

Due to the increased threat of cyberattacks, in 2013 the British armed forces identified a need to upskill and recruit serving personnel who could develop defences, but also recognised that it could look to the wider public and private industry – where cyberspace knowledge was expanding – to recruit Reserves with specialist knowledge in the sector. This has created opportunities to serve for people who might not have considered joining the military.

"The recruitment process didn't exclude anyone," says Neil. "We're able to bring in the best minds in cyber – and speaking from experience as an investigator, people with certain characteristics, like neurodiversity, are the right people to bring in."

For Dan, the opportunity to get involved was too good to miss. He had thought about joining the military many years before, but when he met his wife, she wasn't keen; later, they decided that him joining the TA wasn't a good idea while they had young children. But, he says, "I'd always had this military-shaped hole in my life." When he was approached about joining the Cyber Reserves at a hacking



conference, it sparked his interest, and his wife was fully supportive.

The selection process was, says Neil, "quite terrifying". After submitting an application, the prospective Reserves had to sit before a panel. "The board consisted of Lieutenant Colonels, Group Captains, Wing Commanders, all from the different parts of the military that deal with cyber, and we were asked very high-level questions to test our depth of knowledge." After successfully completing the process, they were offered a choice of which service to work with, and both Neil and Dan chose the RAF.

In the early days there was a period of adjustment for some of the Regulars. "Originally we were all trained at Shrivenham, and you were bringing in people with no military background and putting them together in uniform," says Neil. At first, with just a handful of specialists serving as Cyber Reserves, the group was embedded with a Regular squadron – 591 Signals Unit – an unusual structure for a volunteer unit. Unsurprisingly, it took time for both sides to learn to work together, and there were a few culture shocks for the new recruits.

"I had this naïve idea that the military were a lot further forward than they were [in cyber]



“Four of us went away for two hours and came back with four different ways to compromise a mobile phone”

when I first turned up,” says Dan. “On my first day, when I walked into this converted set of garages with breeze block walls and looked at some of the computer systems, I thought, ‘Oh my god, what have I done?’”

But the team was made welcome, and stayed with 591 Signals for seven years, until sheer numbers necessitated the formation of a separate unit; 6 Cyber Reserve was formed in 2021. Those early experiences helped to forge an understanding, says Dan. “We were treated the same as the Regulars. The guys would invite us to go out on tasks and help them with issues, but right from the beginning we also had that ability for blue-sky thinking. We were allowed to look at how the unit operated and, from an industry perspective, point out where we thought things could be done better.”

A case in point was the ‘closed doors’ culture. “We identified that as a weakness and said that, unless there was a specific reason, doors should be open so people could cross-pollinate between different departments. That worked really well.”

The unit meets up in person once a month and communicates regularly. The role of the Reserves – and the reason behind the unusual recruitment process – is to look at cyber issues with a fresh perspective. It’s not a question of being ‘more skilled’, says Neil, but of bringing different skills. “We don’t do the jobs of the Regulars,” he stresses. “The RAF has very skilled professionals in service. We work alongside and complement them – we don’t do backfilling, we’re there as subject matter experts.”

The materials and demonstrations put together by the squadron are used not only to brief officers in the RAF, but other military services and senior civil servants.

Diverse skillset

The strength of the squadron lies in the diverse backgrounds of its members, and the radically different approaches they take to cyber security problems. “We’ve gone from four or five people sitting in a room to about 50, and each person brings a different skill,” says Neil. “It’s almost like a consultancy, because none of those skills are duplicated. You can bring a problem to the squadron and the Officer in Command (OC) can quickly come back with a number of actions and strategic opportunities that can be delivered at pace, with solid background and evidence behind them.”

A good example of this is demonstrating the risk posed by PEDs – personal electronic devices, such as phones and laptops. “Something we were asked about at the very beginning was the threat from mobile devices. Four of us went away for two hours and came back with four different ways to compromise a mobile phone,” says Dan. From this work, he created a video that is still used in training.

“We were able to graphically illustrate the risk that poses,” adds Neil. “That allows us to build a more confident posture on how we defend against these things.”

While the unit is built around subject matter experts, there are also critical support staff ensuring everything runs smoothly. “Behind the Cyber Reserves is a hard-working team

Previous page: Almost every part of the RAF is digitally connected, so monitoring its IT networks and safeguarding them from intrusion is a top priority

Above: Dan’s work highlighting the risks posed by a compromised mobile phone is still used in training today. (© Getty Images)

“The RAF has skilled professionals in service. We work to complement them – we don’t do any backfilling”



of core function Reserves: an OC, squadron leader, two flight lieutenants, an ops officer and a number of senior NCOs. Without them we wouldn’t be able to function, because we’re not military people,” says Neil.

This is especially important given the high number of neurodiverse people in the ranks, says Dan. “We are rather unique, geeky people that forget stuff all the time. Having that support looking after us, making sure we’re turning up at the right place, at the right time, with the right kit, that we’re getting paid correctly – the RAF did that well from the get-go.”

Two-way exchange

Being a Reserve is, says Neil, “a significant commitment”. All Reserves are required to give 23 days per year, but many – including Neil and Dan – end up giving more like 50 or 60 days on top of full-time jobs in industry, often in senior positions, and their home lives. However, the Reserves are motivated by a desire to give back to their country – and it’s clear that they benefit personally, too.

Dan says: “The most rewarding part for me has been the friendships I’ve made and the relationships I’ve built over time with Regulars who’ve now left but who I’m still in touch with.”

And while he brought his own highly specialised knowledge to benefit the force, he has also experienced huge personal growth through his work as a reservist. “I had this insane fear that I wasn’t good enough,” he says. “I couldn’t do a presentation to save my

life. I mentioned that to my sergeant, to my warrant officer, and I was coached and given opportunities to talk. Now I go off to Vegas, and to Toronto, talking.”

“I love the fact that we have this camaraderie across the Reserves,” adds Neil. “I feel privileged that I’ve gone to some really interesting deployments, where I’ve worked alongside Regular colleagues.”

“There’s one that stands out. I deployed in response to an incident, and it was my subject matter expertise that helped the military understand it. The squadron leader in charge embraced it quickly and we were able to deliver a positive outcome – that makes you feel warm inside, that you’re making a difference and that people are listening to what you’re saying.”

Both Neil and Dan are now passing 10 years of service, and both would like to keep going. For Neil’s part, in future he’d like to see Reserves being able to continue for as long as they are physically able – currently, they are not able to serve beyond the age of 60. “I want to give something back to my country and I like the culture of the military,” he says. “While I’m doing something meaningful, I’d like to keep doing it.”

Dan says that although he hopes to experience different areas of the service, he will have no qualms about extending his time as a Reserve when his current contract ends. “In industry I change jobs every two or three years because I get bored,” he says. “That never happens with my role as an RAF reservist.” **A**

Above: Flight Sergeant Dan on exercise with 6 Cyber Reserve

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RESERVES AT THE SHARP END

The recent Operation Biloxi saw the deployment of 19 RAF reservists. From providing meteorological services to photographing visiting dignitaries, reservists perform a variety of roles, but most agree that it's a life-changing experience

RAF reservists are currently supporting operations worldwide, and have recently returned from Operation Biloxi, the longstanding NATO Air Policing mission for the Black Sea region based at Mihail Kogălniceanu (MK) air base in Romania. A purely defensive operation, the mission was introduced after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and is now part of NATO's assurance measures. Operation centres monitor the airspace and, if an interception is required, NATO aircraft can be scrambled as part of a Quick Reaction Alert (QRA).

Strategically positioned near Constanța on Romania's eastern border, MK air base is just 20km from the Black Sea coast; 300km, as the fighter flies, from Odesa in Ukraine and 400km from Sevastopol in Russian-occupied Crimea. A €2 billion project to expand and modernise the base began in 2021, and it will likely be the largest NATO base in Europe when work is completed.

"As a service, we use reservists a lot more, which means they have a lot more credibility"



Predominantly occupied by the US Army, visiting nations build temporary accommodation for the duration of a tour, but can make use of all the other facilities on the base. As well as gyms and dining halls, there are cinema areas, table tennis and pool tables, and a very popular volleyball court. The US welfare teams also put on language, gardening and first aid classes and a range of events and competitions to ensure there's plenty of options for people to stay busy and motivated.

"Excellent facilities can make a world of difference," says Sergeant Barry, SNCO Delivery at 502 (Ulster) Squadron, the RAF's oldest reservist squadron. "We were fortunate



to be at MK air base during the summer, when it was mostly dry and very warm, which made it very pleasant.”

Support service

Six Typhoon fighter jets plus aircrew and engineers from IX(B) Squadron at RAF Lossiemouth were stationed at MK air base for four months from April 2024. They were supported by an Expeditionary Air Wing (EAW) made up of individual augmentations from all over the RAF, plus a number of reservists.

“We were there to bolster the Romanian forces and the Romanian Air Force. They do their own air policing, we’re there for additional

Typhoons from RAF Lossiemouth operated from Mihail Kogălniceanu air base, Romania, during the multi-national Exercise Dacian Strike – one of many exercises which comprised Operation Biloxi

support,” explains Squadron Leader Kiernan, Chief of Staff, 140 EAW.

“We had about 220 personnel on the EAW as a whole and 19 of those were reservists, which I think is possibly the most reservists the RAF has ever deployed on a single operation. They do a variety of roles, within the media team, intelligence, Mechanical Transport (MT) and support functions, and within the Guard Force protecting our assets.

“It was really interesting to watch how seamlessly the reservists integrated into the team. Our deployment was mostly made up of individual augmentees, who didn’t know each other before they arrived, so it was very easy ➤

“So many opportunities have come my way that could only have come from being an RAF reservist”

for the Reserves to mix in. The professionalism they demonstrated was fantastic. You would not have known, looking externally at this deployment, for example, who was a Regular and who was a reservist. The experience they brought from the real world was phenomenal. It changed the atmosphere within the deployment for the better, without a doubt.”

Mr H, Air and Space Operations Manager at 502 (Ulster) Squadron, has been a reservist for five years, after 23 years as a Regular. His role is to identify skills gaps among reservists with little or no training and compile an appropriate training plan. As the Deployed Operating Base Warrant Officer on Operation Biloxi, his main task was to support the Commanding Officer and Senior Executive Officers within the EAW.

“That actually starts at the lowest level, or from the ground up,” he explains. “Making sure our people are well rested, well fed, and motivated to carry out their duties.

“On deployed operations, we put people in a unique position where they can develop very quickly in a short space of time, be that personally or professionally, and it’s very rewarding to see people reach their potential. It’s great seeing the Reserves fit in. They’re enthusiastic, they’re keen to learn and integrate – they bring that little extra to the team.”

Transferable skills

Flying Officer Rosie Hill is a member of the Mobile Met Unit, an RAF-sponsored Reserves unit providing critical meteorological services in support of defence operations and exercises in the UK and around the world. She works in a civilian capacity for the Met Office at RAF Odiham but was providing support to both aircrew and personnel on Operation Biloxi, cloud forecasting and taking wet-bulb globe temperatures as well as making sure troops had a tactical weather advantage.

“From a meteorological perspective, the skills I’m learning with the Met Office complement what I learn when I get deployed,” she says. “But I also learn about processes and

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

The Reserve forces play a crucial role in national security, from countering security threats, peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts abroad to supporting communities at home.

One week could be at a desk, the next, deploying thousands of miles across the world to uphold global peace and security.

There are 40 Reserves roles in the RAF, many of which offer training and require no previous experience. There are also a number of professional roles that make best use of skills and experience in areas where the RAF has gaps.

Reserves train and work alongside full-time regulars, working at weekends, around their day jobs.

Right, from top: Personnel taking part in drills to prepare for a Quick Reaction Alert (QRA), when NATO aircraft are scrambled in response to an incident in the air space monitored by the operation centres; Reserves carried out a number of roles on Operation Biloxi, including media, intelligence, Mechanical Transport (MT) and support, as well as the Guard Force



communication skills, which are important both within the civilian world and the RAF.

"Being embedded within the detachment is really beneficial," she adds. "Out there, we're getting to know the platform we're working with, and also how best to tailor briefs and the information we provide, to help both in day-to-day living and also from a safety point of view for the aircraft and personnel on the ground."

"It's a very rewarding job but it also comes with quite a lot of responsibility. I've only been in the unit two years and I've still got loads to learn but I'm really enjoying the journey."

Air Specialist (Class 1) Rossiter, of 614 (County of Glamorgan) Squadron in Wales, has been a reservist driver for five years. MT drivers play a crucial role in the RAF, transporting personnel and equipment, and driving a range of vehicles from cars and minibuses to HGVs and snow ploughs. AS1 Rossiter spent four months in Cyprus on Operation Shader and enjoyed it so much that she volunteered for a second mobilisation.

"It's a varied role," she says. "You could be transporting people to the airport, doing a VIP run for a senior RAF member or sweeping the runway."

"There are always challenges within the RAF, and if you're the kind of person who thrives under pressure, then it's definitely the environment for you. It's very different from my day job, and I think that is the big attraction. When I'm not on mobilisation, I can get involved with training or other activities such as remembrance events and parades."

"I've enjoyed all the experiences that the RAF has given me. If anybody asked me if I'd recommend they join, I would absolutely say yes. If you like a challenge, excitement and you want to learn new things, it's definitely the place to be."

AS1 Andrews is based at 502 Squadron in Belfast, but also sits under the Media Reserves Squadron based at RAF Halton. She joined the Reserves five years ago and has since supported the government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and been posted to Darwin in Australia with 6 Squadron. She was a media reservist on Operation Biloxi on the Mobile News Team (MNT), covering QRA activity, exercises, visiting dignitaries, defence engagement activities, and promoting the RAF to allied partners.

CALL OF DUTY

Sergeant Barry, SNCO Delivery at 502 (Ulster) Squadron, explains how reservists are called up.

"The whole process starts with a need, whether that be for an exercise, operation or a deployment overseas or in the UK. That could come in the form of a trawl for volunteers or it could be someone like me going into a capability to ask for opportunities. I consider the length of the deployment, who fits the requirement and, if there is more than one applicant, who it best suits for development."

"Other factors to consider are whether we can get finance and whether it meets all the requirements to authorise a callout order under the Reserve Forces Act of 1996."

"I then have to arrange all training before the individual is mobilised to ensure they know where they are going, when, and how long for. This could be anything from a week to three months, depending on where they are and what they do."

"I also have to work out the total length of the mobilisation, including all Annual Leave Allowance (ALA) and any Post Operational Leave (POL). This will allow the individual to speak to their employer and family before we formally call them out for deployment."

"I got to meet people from all walks of life, both Reserve and Regular," she says. "Working on the MNT means I engage with all professions and ranks and it's fascinating to see how they work, understand their roles and responsibilities, and ultimately how they fit into the bigger picture to ensure mission success."

AS1 Karim Bachu joined the reservists 11 years ago as a Regiment Gunner with 2503 Squadron based at RAF Waddington. He undertook guard duties at MK air base, ensuring that everyone who came into the compound had the necessary ID and a valid reason to be there.


"Over the years so many opportunities have come my way that could only have come from being an RAF reservist," he says. "You get to meet people with different interests, and if something interests you, you could also give it a try. The highlight for me was the opportunity to apply to be an astronaut as part of the European Space Agency program. I put my application forward and had an online interview. It's an ongoing process so I will see where it gets to."

Crucial role

As the global security situation worsens and the demand on the UK's forces increases, reservists are likely to be required to play an even greater role in future operations.

"As a service, we use reservists a lot more, which means they have a lot more credibility," says Mr H. "Whether backfilling a UK role or deployed on operations, we need that flexibility. Utilising Reserves' skills is paramount for the future."

"In the past 17 years, I have seen more and more reservists coming into what we would consider to be day-to-day roles and functions within the RAF," adds Squadron Leader Kiernan. "My previous experience of reservists was predominantly on operations, where they were mobilised for a short time to fulfil a certain task, whereas now I think it's become much more the norm."

"Reserve squadrons bring a huge amount to the party. They have more capacity than we do on many units, where we're often one-deep in key positions. To have that resilience and capacity, particularly if you're fortunate enough, like I was at RAF Waddington, to have a reserve squadron on your unit, has been fantastic. It's evolved so much and I can only imagine how quickly it's going to keep evolving." 

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There are almost 6,000 volunteers who donate their time to support the work of the RAF Association

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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Every year the RAF Association provides life-changing help and support to serving personnel, veterans and their families. In this issue of *Air Mail* we meet just a few of the 6,000 volunteers who give up their time to support the work of the RAF Association

Corporal Shona Brownlee MBE

Corporal Shona Brownlee MBE is a Musician in the RAF Central Band. She is also a member of the RAF's Elite Athlete scheme, part of the Great Britain Para Alpine Ski Team and (in 2023) was the British Paratriathlon champion.

Shona has been an RAF Association Connections for Life volunteer since April 2020, and fulfils her volunteer commitments from wherever in the world she is training or competing.

"I've been a RAFA Connections for Life volunteer for three and a half years and I really enjoy it. When COVID-19 first hit, I heard that RAFA was trying to contact elderly veterans to check in on them and I decided to sign up to help.

"I have continued to volunteer since then and it's now a regular part of my week. I speak to one gentleman who, sadly, doesn't really speak to anyone else during the week. I find that an actual telephone conversation really creates a personal connection that just isn't there through email or texts, which can often feel quite impersonal.

"It's easy to underestimate how much of an impact that personal connection can



Above: Corporal Shona Brownlee MBE is a Connections for Life volunteer Below: Alan Roberts is a volunteer caseworker for RAFA



have. Particularly for those who don't have it anywhere else in their lives, it can be so important.

"RAFA's Connections for Life service is really special, both for those of us who volunteer and for those we call. For some people, that one phone call really is the highlight of their week."

Alan Roberts

Alan Roberts served for 27 years in the Royal Air Force. He is now a volunteer caseworker for the RAF Association.

"During my 27 years in the Royal Air Force, I learned that asking for help doesn't come easy to many in the RAF community. We're a proud lot, and we'll do everything we can to dig in and struggle on.

"I always remember the shock of visiting an elderly couple who were living in dire conditions. Despite being springtime, they were huddled in their coats because it was bitterly cold in their house. They were very apologetic and explained that their boiler hadn't worked properly for four months. To try and keep warm, they were forced to block off parts of the house and confine themselves to one room.



VOLUNTEERING AT THE RAF ASSOCIATION

The RAF Association is supported by a committed team of almost 6,000 volunteers who donate their time to support the work of the charity, enabling the Association to achieve a much greater output than would otherwise be possible. From volunteering to make friendship calls and carrying out welfare visits, to helping run a branch or man a feed station at a RAFA Rides event, the volunteering roles available at the RAF Association are many and varied. The Association remains the only military charity to train its volunteers to nationally-accredited standards. Course subjects include safeguarding, casework and grief awareness. In 2023, over 1,200 were completed by Association volunteers and in November 2023, the charity was recognised by the AIM Awards for the quality of its training.

“They gave so much, but ask for so little. I often find that RAF veterans won’t ask for much, because they feel there are others more in need than themselves.

“As a caseworker for the RAF Association, I often find that the reason people call us is only the start of their problems. One of my colleagues once visited a family who’d asked for help with a cooker. They kindly made him a cup of tea, but he could see that the cupboards were bare and they hardly had a scrap to eat.

“I feel very humbled to be able to help these proud people who have served our country.”

Jim Cassidy

A chance meeting in a local supermarket led Jim Cassidy to joining the Association’s Leuchars Branch more than 40 years after leaving the service. As well as being an RAF Association Connections for Life volunteer, Jim also uses his years as a BBC reporter to help deliver *Talking Air Mail* – the audio version of the magazine for members with sight loss.

“I had been wearing a sweatshirt with a Vulcan XH558 logo, when another shopper asked me if I had ever been in the RAF and whether I was an Association member. I told him I’d served as an air radio mechanic at Waddington on the Vulcan Line Squadron in the late 60s, then spent some time with 48 Squadron on Hercules at Changi before ending my service with 6 Squadron Phantoms at Coningsby. He invited me to their next monthly meeting. So after leaving the RAF in 1973 I joined the Association’s Leuchars branch in November 2019.

“I was reading *Air Mail* and saw that the Association offered an audio version – *Talking Air Mail* – for members with sight loss. I had spent 25 years in BBC radio as a reporter, presenter and newsreader so had plenty of experience in recording and editing scripts. I contacted the editor and asked if they needed anyone to record parts of their magazine. They were delighted, and gratefully accepted my offer. Since then I have regularly recorded selected pieces in my home studio that I use for voiceover and audiobook work.

“I love the stories in *Air Mail*. Among my favourites are the personal experiences of those who served during the Falklands conflict. Another was the vital work of the meteorologists in the run up to D-Day. But



Left: Jim Cassidy, Connections for Life and *Talking Air Mail* volunteer
Below: Andy Markham, pictured alongside RAF Association ambassador Matt Tebbutt during a wingwalking challenge, has raised thousands of pounds for the Association



© Andy Markham

really every issue has something new or unusual about life in the RAF, be it historical or modern.

“I still continue with my work as a Connections for Life volunteer, work that can be difficult and rewarding at the same time.”

Andy Markham

For many years, Andy Markham gave up his time to fundraise for the RAF Association. From cycling to wingwalking he raised more than £2,000 for the charity before turning his attention to volunteering. He is now an RAF Association Connections for Life and casework volunteer.

“I’ve always been in and around the Air Force with my jobs and I thought the Association was a really good charity to volunteer with, particularly in terms of helping veterans.

“I’ve been a Connections for Life volunteer for a few years now and it’s been brilliant. I really enjoy it and we have some fantastic conversations.

“I get loads and loads of support. It’s really nice to get those phone calls from the Welfare team, checking in on how I’m doing. I know that if I ever have any difficulties, the support is just at the end of a phone.”

“I quite like helping people and it helps my wellbeing. The research shows that helping other people is good for your own wellbeing, so it’s good for beneficiaries and it’s good for me too.” **A**



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PEAK PERF



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PERFORMANCE

Since 1943, the RAF Mountain Rescue Service has been saving lives in some of the most dangerous environments imaginable. Brian Canfer and Kate Chandler recount how it all began, and look at what it takes to be part of a team who voluntarily risk their lives to save others

Volunteering has always been the essence of the RAF Mountain Rescue Service (MRS). From permanent, full-time voluntary roles to part-time positions, volunteers comprise the bulk of the team. But that name, part-timer, masks the huge contribution that team members commit to and deliver, time after time, without question.

Determination, an ingrained sense of loyalty and unwavering commitment are all essential to being part of the broad mountain rescue family. It demands that a team of volunteers not only be available to respond to callouts 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, but that members also train, in often atrocious conditions, on three weekends each month. The team are frequently required to react to callouts on the return to, or within minutes of arriving back at base.

The attendance of the whole team at a weekly evening briefing, reflecting upon previous callouts, shaping future training weekends and refreshing medical and safety skills, further cements team cohesion. It is no small ask.

When the RAF MRS was founded by Flight Lieutenant George Graham in 1943, the bulk of the team were volunteers. Some had experience in climbing and caving, but many did not.

During the early wartime and post-war years, there was a limited provision of structured MRS procedures. Training was random, and the service was reliant on the enthusiasm, skills and availability of a unique cohort of personnel

who simply wanted to help. Teams consisted primarily of fell and hill walkers, with a few having some knowledge of the mountains and their hidden risks. The kit was also barely adequate. Today, the thought of wandering around hills in a gale, often at night, wearing normal 'hairy' blues with a gas cape when it rained, almost defies belief, but back then it was the norm.

Stretched to the limits

Not until 1951 did deficiencies in training, knowledge and procedures come to a head. In March of that year, a maritime reconnaissance Lancaster, operating from RAF Kinloss, failed to return to base following a training exercise. RAF Kinloss assembled a search party, which had only just returned from a previous callout in treacherous conditions. The exhausted rescue team was tasked to respond, despite having no knowledge of the crash site location or surrounding terrain.

Following reports from members of the public who had witnessed lights from the aircraft prior to the collision, air and ground searches were guided towards a place known as the Triple Buttress, which lies above Loch Coire Mhic Fhearchair in Scotland's Beinn Eighe group.

The Lancaster crew had been carrying out a night-time navigation exercise around Cape Wrath in northern Scotland. A deep low pressure had formed while the aircraft was airborne, bringing the crew off course and placing

DEDICATED TO SERVICE

Brian Canfer has been Chairman of the RAF Mountain Rescue Association since 1993. He joined the RAF in 1965 as a navigator, worked in Air Traffic Control then converted to Search and Rescue helicopters where he stayed for 11 years. His final posting was to MOD London, where he was responsible for the six MRS teams.

Kate Chandler was commissioned into the RAF in 1990 as an Air Traffic Control Officer, and served on multiple airfield and area radar tours over 25 years. She joined RAF Leuchars MRT in 1998, and became a Volunteer ex-Regular Reserve in 2015, currently operating in Air Capability Delivery.



CENTRE OF OPERATIONS

RAF MRS Headquarters is based at RAF Valley on Anglesey, Wales. It commands and allocates taskings across the teams at RAF Leeming, RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Valley. Each team is managed by permanent staff and part-time volunteers from across all three services.

The mission statement of the RAF MRS is: To generate and sustain a world-class high-readiness incident response for Search and Rescue and Aircraft Post Crash Management operations. Capable of self-sustaining all-weather deployment to all regions within the UK and globally in support of MOD aviation and resilience operations.

the aircraft almost 60 miles further south than anticipated. It was thought that the crew had begun their descent believing they were over the safety of the Moray Firth when they struck the mountainside.

The aircraft crashed 15 feet from the summit, killing all on board. It lay in an area known for its hostile and almost inaccessible features, at the western side of the Triple Buttress.

The search party was made up of national servicemen, some with limited skillsets and a lack of specialist equipment. They were faced with challenging terrain and extreme weather conditions. Deep snow further hampered efforts and it took months to recover the bodies. Pieces of the wreckage still remain in an area known locally as Fuselage Gully. A small brass plaque on part of the wreckage records the incident.

There was a public outcry at the subsequent investigation, which led to many of the recommendations upon which the foundations of the modern MRS were built. It also resulted in the publication of the UK's first mountain rescue handbook, *Pam Air 299*. The document was produced by the MRS to ensure the standardisation of techniques and procedures. The development and application of structured training created a stronger and more capable MRS, able to deliver Aircraft Post Crash and Incident Management, Search and Rescue services, and Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA).

Committed to the cause

While no central record was kept from the original formation in 1943, it is estimated that around 8,500 men and women have risked their lives while serving or volunteering in the MRS – and not just from the RAF. Many personnel from across the services have undertaken the gruelling three-week trial to demonstrate the strength of character and dogged determination needed to prevail. Not all trialists succeed, and very few return for a second trial if initially unsuccessful. Some do, however, and it's possibly more of a challenge when they know what to expect.

Structured training involves annual winter and summer courses, with every individual's training recorded within a dedicated logbook. Once sufficient knowledge has been learned, and applications demonstrated, the individual is awarded the coveted arm badge. Initially limited



“They were faced with challenging terrain and extreme weather”

to ranks up to and including Flight Sergeant, this restriction was later removed and at the last count there were at least three Air Officers who proudly display the badge on their No1 uniforms.

For the first four decades the ‘Officer in Charge’ system was in place, albeit behind the scenes an informal meritocracy reigned. In more recent times the ‘Officer in Charge’ label has been replaced by MRT Liaison Officer (MRTLO). While conventional rank structure is still observed within the team for routine day-to-day matters, during training and callouts a meritocracy based on MR-related qualifications and experience is officially adopted.

The length of time spent supporting mountain rescue activities varies dramatically. Some members will serve for a couple of years, some much longer. One individual has committed more than 30 years to the service.

The unwavering support from local communities embeds the team in the environments in which they operate, with



honorary team membership being bestowed on some of the most incredible civilians you could ever wish to meet.

The environment itself can trigger a rollercoaster of emotions: excitement and euphoria when a rescue goes well, but there are downsides too. Twelve troops have made the ultimate sacrifice in the selfless endeavour to rescue those in need. Many more have sustained physical and psychological injuries, relationships have failed, and lives have been changed forever.

There have been some amazing achievements too, none more so than when two troops summited Everest during the RAF's first single service expedition in 2001. Even there the team was on duty, rescuing an Australian climber who had fallen ill two miles above base camp.

Life as a member of an RAF Mountain Rescue Team (MRT) is not confined to arduous climbs and mountaineering. There are numerous skills to be mastered, knots to be learned so they can be safely tied and relied upon, even in the most extreme weather. Each team member must implicitly trust their colleagues in every situation, from being lowered down a mountainside tied to a stretcher or riding shotgun in driving rain and drifting snow, to never walking past a piece of kit without loading or unloading as necessary.

Then there are the more mundane but equally essential skills. How to plan and execute a search, for example, or how to cook a meal for 36 people, often with minimal equipment. In the early days, weekends and operations relied on camping in 160lb tents while cooking outside using the petrol-powered Hydra burner (aka 'the bomb'). Many are the tales of near misses with this awesome and frankly dangerous piece of kit.

All team members take their rotations in the kitchen, making sure that a hot and welcoming pot of tea and a meal is awaiting the weary members as they return from the exertions of the day. Some enjoy the role more than others, from budding *MasterChef* finalists producing a meal worthy of a Michelin Star to those that aspire to cook a leg of lamb in a frying pan, or boil a swede whole. The whole team muck in as needed to ensure the 'scran' is on the table.

Despite the changes in personnel, procedures and equipment over the past 80 years, the ethos of those first rescuers has remained: to voluntarily go to the aid of those stranded or injured in the mountains and hills, be they civilian or military. In doing so, the RAF MRS has made an immeasurable difference to tens of thousands of people, and saved countless lives. Long may it continue. **A**



Previous page, top: MRS troops train using a rescue stretcher to lower a simulated air crash casualty from Snowdonia, or Eryri, in Wales

Bottom: A member of the MRT practises procedures and drills in the Cairngorms mountain range, Scotland

Above: RAF Valley MRT training in Scotland during their annual winter training week. Winter training week is conducted by all three MRTs. It introduces winter skills to new members and consolidates advanced skills for more experienced ones
Inset: RAF helicopters have proven to be a vital resource to MRS teams, offering a way to quickly evacuate casualties – weather permitting

HELIGOLAND: 1939

The Battle of Heligoland Bight in 1939 was the first named air battle of the Second World War. It proved to be a baptism of fire and a disaster for the RAF. To mark the 85th anniversary this December, Doug Aylward explores what went wrong, and how the experience shaped the future of Bomber Command

Wing Commander Kellett of 149 Squadron was tasked with leading the formation of 24 bombers over the north German coast. Image courtesy of R. Kellett.



In the initial days of the war, the RAF faced a number of tactical constraints. Belgium and Holland were neutral, thus their airspace was inviolable. France had also requested that Britain not attack German land targets because L'Armée de l'Air could not contend with a retaliatory attack on their cities and factories. Such targets were therefore off-limits.

Despite these constraints, a legitimate target was identified: the German naval fleet at its base in Wilhelmshaven some 350 miles across the North Sea. There was one proviso however: no ship near land, either naval or merchant, could be attacked. Such an act could jeopardise the safety of civilians and would not be tolerated. At this early stage of the war, both Britain and Germany were anxious to avoid an escalation of hostilities.

Raids into the area by Wellingtons of 3 Group Bomber Command were undertaken in early December. Though of variable success, the raids highlighted the generally poor level of formation flying and lack of high-level bombing practice and gunnery training for the gunners; mainly young ground crew who had volunteered and learnt on the job. Time was

spent trying to rectify these basic deficiencies, although many other squadrons within 3 Group were equally undertrained.

Briefing

On the afternoon of 17 December 1939, 3 Group Bomber Command HQ at RAF Mildenhall received an instruction to have crews ready for take-off at 0730hrs the following morning.

Wing Commander Kellett of 149 Squadron, together with other flight leaders from 149, IX and 37 Squadrons were summoned for a briefing later that day. Kellett's mission was to lead a formation of 24 bombers, nine each from 149 and IX Squadrons and six from 37 Squadron, to the Schillig Roads or to Wilhelmshaven to bomb German warships.

The Wellingtons from all three squadrons took off between 0900 and 0945hrs and rendezvoused en route to join up in a 'big diamond' formation, with six aircraft in each of the lead, port, starboard and rear flights.

Two Wellingtons soon returned to base due to technical and communication issues, leaving the remaining 22 bombers to carry on through the clear blue skies above the north German coast of Schleswig-Holstein.

Such was the fine weather that, not far away, a Luftwaffe commander remarked to his adjutant: "Splendid weather for fighters." The adjutant dutifully replied: "The Tommies are not such fools. They won't come today." At the same time, on the sand dunes off the East Frisian island of Wangerooge, a German Leutnant was demonstrating the new Freya radar. Spotting an echo coming from Heligoland, he tried to report it to HQ. Disbelief was the only response: "Tommies approaching in weather like this? You're plotting seagulls or there is interference on your set."

Unimpeded, the bombers passed safely over Heligoland. Finding no viable targets in Brunsbüttel, the Schillig Roads or the Jade Bight, Kellett decided to turn sharply to starboard and head the formation of Wellingtons in a northerly direction towards the port of Wilhelmshaven. During this manoeuvre, the six aircraft on the



port side of the big diamond formation failed to keep up. This breakdown in formation was later to prove fatal.

At Wilhelmshaven the bombers found three large warships and four destroyers, including the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. However, given the vessels' proximity to land and the crews' specific orders not to attack in such circumstances, there was little the RAF could do.

Rather belatedly, the Luftwaffe launched 25 Me.109s and 19 Me.110s to combat the approaching Wellingtons. The 44 German fighter aircraft outnumbered the Wellingtons by two to one.



Under attack

Having fought Wellingtons before, the Luftwaffe had a clear tactic in mind. They knew that the Wellington turrets could not traverse to a full right angle to the fuselage, which resulted in them having a blind spot on the beam. Luftwaffe commanders therefore urged their pilots to knock out the Wellingtons' rear turrets at long range with their 20mm cannon – well out of range of the Wellingtons' .303-inch guns. The Messerschmitts were then able to close in for the kill.

At the rear of the big diamond, the six aircraft of 37 Squadron were struggling to keep their place in the formation. Soon they began to straggle, resulting in each having to fend for itself.

An Me.110 attacked the lead Wellington in 37 Squadron, which crashed into the sea with no survivors. In another Wellington, the rear gunner was hit by enemy fire in the ankle and back. A fellow crewman came to his aid, but in doing so was fatally wounded in the head and the back. The observer in the crew also received fatal injuries. The aircraft was forced down onto the Frisian island of Borkum, off the north German coast and the three surviving crew were taken prisoner.



Left: The 24 Wellington bombers set off from RAF Mildenhall, RAF Honington and RAF Feltwell on the morning of 18 December 1939, and joined up in a 'big diamond' formation (above). Image from the Derrick Allaway Collection courtesy of R. James. Top: The bombers identified the German battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at Wilhelmshaven, but they were too close to the mainland to launch an attack



Right: 'Sole Survivor' painting, showing 'Cheese' Lemon's Wellington escaping at sea-level while the pursuing aircraft clips the waves before crashing. Artist unknown, image courtesy of the RAF Club.

Right, bottom: Unlike many others, this battle-damaged Wellington made it back to home soil

Below: Wellington Mk1s from IX Squadron took part in the Heligoland raid. Courtesy of the Beeny collection.

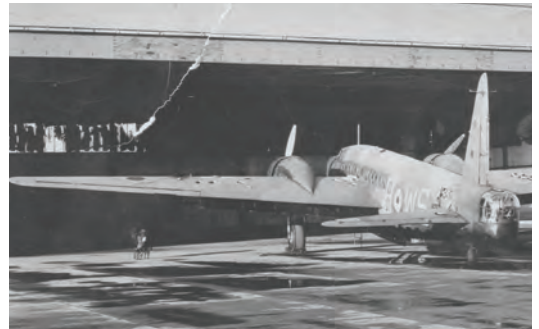
A third 37 Squadron Wellington was attacked and crashed into the sea beyond Borkum with no survivors. A fourth was also shot down and ditched in the sea, with the only survivor taken prisoner. The fifth was similarly shot down, with only one body ever recovered for burial.

The sixth and final aircraft from 37 Squadron was piloted by Flying Officer 'Cheese' Lemon. During the battle, his aircraft suddenly climbed rapidly, lost speed and departed from the flight. Lemon's account of the incident relates that this occurred due to a crew member inadvertently touching the flaps lever when he was moving forwards towards the front turret. This in turn caused the flaps to be put down, resulting in the aircraft swiftly losing position in the formation. The Wellington, now isolated, was immediately pounced on by two Me.109s.

Lemon dived steeply towards sea level and was followed by one of the 109s. In the ensuing chase, the Messerschmitt's wingtip touched the waves and the fighter spiralled into the sea with the loss of both enemy aircraft and pilot. Lemon was therefore able to make his escape.

Upon landing back at RAF Feltwell at 1540hrs, and following a half-hearted debrief, Lemon and his crew waited in vain for the rest of 37 Squadron to return, unaware that they were the sole survivors.

Outnumbered, the other flights within the big diamond, though not suffering as badly as 37 Squadron in the rear, fared little better during the encounter. IX Squadron's Flight Lieutenant Grant later stated that he had begun to feel the situation was hopeless. "There was nothing we could do except sit there and be picked off one by one," he recalled.



Difficult lesson

At approximately 1330hrs the battle drew to a close. Of the 22 British aircraft in action that day, 12 did not return and 57 lives were lost. The Luftwaffe lost only two pilots and their aircraft.

As a result of its experiences over Heligoland, Bomber Command effectively discontinued daylight bombing raids over mainland Germany in favour of night operations. Had this bitter experience not been heeded, the RAF bomber force would have faced near annihilation at the hands of a then-dominant Luftwaffe.

This change in policy also paved the way for the vast night-bombing raids later in the war, and when the US Army Air Force began their own daylight raids in 1942, ensured that German infrastructure would come under attack both day and night until the final Allied victory in 1945. **A**

Doug Aylward is a researcher for the Heligoland39 Project, which aimed to find relatives of the 130 aircrew who participated in the air battle of Heligoland Bight, so they might come together for commemorative events. Once located, relatives of the aircrew began to share their stories and memorabilia, resulting in the publication of Daylight to Darkness, a record of the battle and a biography of each airman who flew on that fateful operation. For more, visit: heligoland39.org





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“I braced myself for the ensuing explosion”

Ade Pitman’s heart-stopping moment guarding RAF St Mawgan



ADE PITMAN is a member of the Association’s Barry and the Vale Branch. He recently completed his memoir, *The Peace Dividend*, and can be contacted at aderoaming@gmail.com.

I WAS stationed at RAF St Mawgan during the first Gulf War when we received a briefing about potential terrorist threats now that we were at war. It was unlikely that terrorists would venture into remote Cornwall, but we had to be alert all the same.

Our brief explained that in the middle of the night, terrorists would speed down the narrow lane to the camp gate with their headlights blazing in order to blind the armed guards. Then they would detonate their bomb.

It would be game over for the whole gate area and anyone who was unlucky enough to be there at the time. This would get the terrorists some publicity, but the reality of the situation took the shine off of our sleepy Cornish paradise. Thus it was that I found myself alone, defending the station gate with my trusty SLR rifle.

The RAF Police Dog Section was located across from the gate. So, to relieve the boredom – and to stop the police from getting any sleep – I would wait until the dogs had fallen asleep, then whistle.

Within moments every dog would be barking, and the RAF Police would be as awake as I was. However, one night I didn’t need to wake the dogs to get my fill of excitement.

It was the dead of night when I noticed a car racing down the lane towards the gate with its headlights blazing, just as the briefing had warned. As the car came speeding around the corner, its lights doing their best to destroy my night vision, I raised my SLR into the aim position. From there it was a simple matter of pulling back the cocking handle to chamber a round before firing.



I would either be a hero for saving the station or be facing a life in prison; there would be no half-measures. I wished I wasn’t there at that moment, but I didn’t want to be blown up either.

I had been in the RAF for less than a year, and had to make this life-and-death decision in an instant. There was no one to ask what to do, and no time to ask anyway. My only certainty as I flipped out the cocking handle of my SLR was that, regardless of the light, I could place a single bullet through the car’s windscreen and into the driver.

The car stopped immediately and I braced myself for the ensuing explosion. I felt myself tense the cocking handle and was an instant away from firing a round. The lights went off and I held steady, still aiming at the driver’s position. The window opened and a little old lady stuck her head out: “I thought you were going to shoot me!” she said.

The threat to my life now gone, I folded away the cocking handle and replied, “I thought I was going to shoot you too!”

To this day, I am glad that I can laugh about that night, and that it didn’t end differently. During the following shift, I continued my game of waking the police dogs to relieve the boredom, but I had certainly experienced enough excitement for a while.

Top right: Ade had been warned that terrorists might attempt to dazzle guards with car headlights

BEXHILL-ON-SEA BRANCH

100 years old and still 'piloting' a Lancaster

To mark his 100th birthday earlier this year (Summer issue, p57), branch members arranged for Roy Oldcorn to visit the Spitfire & Hurricane Memorial Museum in Manston. While there, the former Lancaster pilot climbed aboard the museum's Lancaster simulator, automatically commenced the pre-

flight checks, then flew to London, passing under the Queen Elizabeth II bridge at Dartford, before landing at London City Airport. After his flight, Roy was invited to sign the visitor log, and was presented with his flight certificate and a museum cap. He also received a round of applause from museum visitors.



100-year-old Roy Oldcorn at the Spitfire & Hurricane Memorial Museum in Manston

CORSHAM AND CHIPPENHAM BRANCH

Statue to honour Sir George Dowty

The branch standard was in attendance at the unveiling of a statue of Sir George Dowty at Stanton St Quintin. An aeronautical engineer, industrialist and founder of Dowty Aviation, George was also responsible for designing the undercarriage for the Lancaster bomber, along with other aircraft. Two ex-RAF Chipmunk aircraft provided a flypast during the unveiling.



Sir George Dowty immortalised at Stanton St Quintin

IN BRIEF

Angus Branch

Members of the branch have laid a wreath at the Arras Flying Services Memorial in the Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery, France, where the branch's Gordon Millar also read the RAF Association's dedication. A number of men from Angus joined the RFC and RNAS from the Black Watch in 1915, and as such the branch was accompanied by members of the Angus Black Watch Association and the Association of Royal Navy Officers in a tri-services tribute.

Bridport and Lyme Regis RMG

Branch members attended Tarrant Rushton airfield in Dorset for the D-Day 80th anniversary celebrations in June. Later that month they enjoyed a number of talks on D-Day by local residents who had experienced it, as well as a talk by a guest speaker from the US Army's 16th Infantry Regiment who had been stationed locally. Funds were also raised for the Wings Appeal during a successful quiz night.

Downham Market Branch

RAF Marham played host to members of Downham Market Branch during a station tour, which culminated in a visit to the station commander's house where the branch president and his wife provided refreshments. The event was organised by branch RAF

Association Liaison Officer, Flight Lieutenant Sandra Butcher.



IN BRIEF

Mid-Somerset Branch

With a team of volunteers and a refurbished publicity stand, the branch set about raising funds for the Wings Appeal. Members enjoyed a summer lunch in July, where past chairman Squadron Leader Ron Fell DFC was remembered. The Battle of Britain trophy he awarded to Mendip Golf Club in 1959 has been competed for every year since, with golfers making a fine contribution to this year's fundraising.



Netherlands Branch

A summer barbecue was held by branch members at the Dutch Air Force Historical Flight. Close to 30 members also enjoyed a tour of the historic aircraft, based at Glize-Rijen airbase, and funds were raised by the traditional branch raffle.



DUNSTABLE, LEIGHTON BUZZARD AND LUTON

Windsor Castle, the backdrop for Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Luton branch's teatime treat



Teatime on the Thames at Windsor

A cruise along the River Thames at Windsor, with afternoon tea included, was organised by branch members in July. In the spirit of inter-service and community cooperation, members of the local Royal Naval Association and Royal British Legion, plus residents and staff from two assisted-living establishments in Luton, were invited along, bringing the total to 51.

SUD-OUEST BRANCH

French tribute to D-Day crews

Despite hosting the Summer Olympics and Paralympics, and enjoying their summer holidays, the French public still honoured those RAF aircrew who died for their liberty after D-Day.

Sud-Ouest Branch took part in nine remembrance ceremonies in July and August alone, with one event in Brillac seeing more than 200 people in attendance.



These are just some of the welfare and wellbeing events delivered by branches, RMGs and branch clubs. The RAF Association is proud of their amazing work and wants to continue working with its network to support the wider RAF community. To find out about the support available, download the branch wellbeing activities guide from the Members' Portal at: rafa.org.uk/branchwellbeing

BALDERTON BRANCH

Remembering Just Jane – a Lincolnshire Lanc

In June, the branch donated a signed booklet to the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, the home of Lancaster B Mk VII NX611, Just Jane, which is being restored. The booklet, *The Story of a Lanc*, was donated by Branch President Wing Commander Nigel Branston MBE during a visit. Nigel acquired the

booklet during his time at RAF Scampton when Just Jane was the station's gate guardian. In his secondary duty, he showed visitors around the station, usually beginning with a tour of Just Jane. When posted away he was given a signed copy of the booklet, which has been gratefully received by the heritage centre.



Just Jane and visitors at Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre

IN BRIEF

Oldham Branch

Branch members attended celebrations in St Peter's Square, Manchester, on Armed Forces Day, where standards were paraded and more than £580 was raised for the Wings Appeal.



Romsey Branch

Sixteen members enjoyed afternoon tea to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day in June. This social event was followed in July by the branch having a stall at the Romsey Mayor's picnic at Romsey War Memorial Park to raise funds for the Wings Appeal.

HARTLEPOOL BRANCH

Armed Forces Day celebrations

The Lord Lieutenant of Durham, Sue Snowdon, met branch members at their Wings Appeal stall during her visit to present a standard to Hartlepool Armed Forces Breakfast Club on Armed Forces Day in June. The event was held at Heugh Battery, Hartlepool, which has been a military position since the 17th century. Restored by volunteers, the Heugh Battery Museum preserves the only First World War battlefield in Britain.



Lord Lieutenant of Durham, Sue Snowdon (centre), at Heugh Battery, Hartlepool

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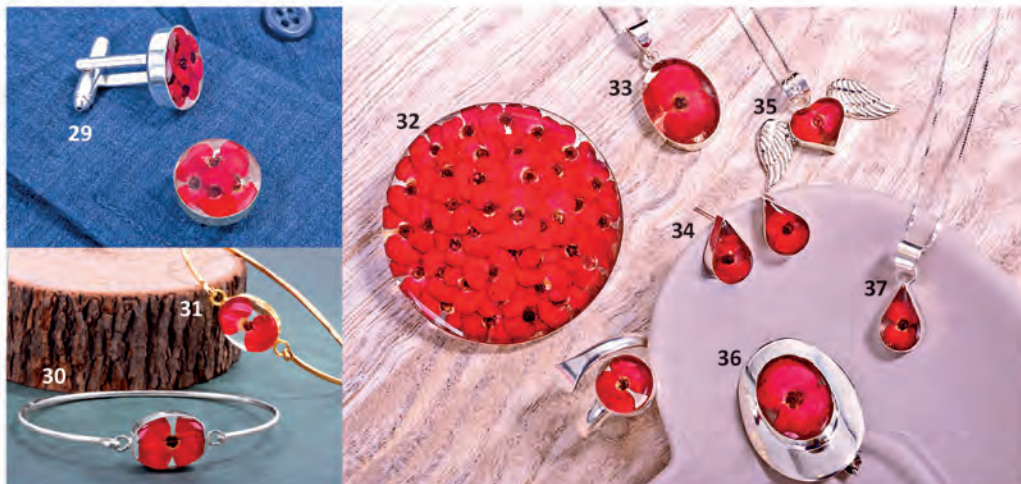
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CRAWLEY RMG

Visiting Surrey helicopters

Members of Crawley RMG recently visited Kent, Surrey and Sussex emergency medical helicopters at Redhill in Surrey. The organisation has two helicopters and four rapid response vehicles, operating around the clock and transporting lifesaving crews and medical equipment on an average of nine emergency calls a day.



RMG members during the visit

WADDINGTON BRANCH



Eden Camp Modern History Museum in North Yorkshire

A good day out at Eden Camp North Yorkshire

The branch enjoyed good weather during a trip to Eden Camp Modern History Museum in North Yorkshire. Eden Camp, a former Italian POW camp, contains a wealth of uniforms, equipment and information on all aspects of warfare, both military and civilian. Many of the displays cover subjects not generally known, and all the visitors commented on some unique aspect they had seen. Despite the two-hour coach ride from Waddington, branch members would highly recommend the venue to other branches looking for a good day out.

A Send your branch news to us!

We welcome all submissions for Branch News, preferably by email to airmail@rafa.org.uk.

Word count should be no more than 100 words. You may submit as many accompanying photographs as you like but a maximum of one will be published. 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 get published. Submission does not guarantee inclusion and where there are too many reports for an issue, the editor

reserves the right to edit. Where the number of submissions exceeds the space available, preference will be given to welfare news and also to news over photographs. Only submissions made by email will be acknowledged before publication. The deadline for inclusion in the next issue is **1 November 2024**.

BRANCH NEWS TIPS

Learn more about the kinds of branch news we'd like to publish, as well as a few extra tips, by downloading the guide from the Members' Portal at: rafa.org.uk/branchtips

WRAF BRANCH

“They have come a long way, and the path is open to even greater things”

The WRAF in the spotlight on 75th anniversary

AFTER TWO YEARS of planning by a dedicated team of members, the branch held a two-part celebration to mark the 75th anniversary of the re-introduction of the WRAF into service in 1949.

The first part comprised a weekend of events in London in May, which included a tour of the Tower of London and attendance at the ceremony of the keys. This was made possible through an ex-WRAF Yeoman Warder who arranged for 60 branch members to have a personal guided tour and witness the ancient ceremony which has taken place for more than 700 years.

A commemorative church service at St Clement Danes then took place, which included the parading of the Branch Standard, readings from the New and Old Testaments, and the poem ‘Memorial to Servicewomen’ which was written specially for the Branch. The Reverend’s sermon also touched on the history of the WRAF.

Following the service, branch members headed to the Royal Air Force Club in Piccadilly for lunch set against a backdrop of photographs covering the past 75 years of women in the RAF. The Club has been welcoming members since 1922, and includes two windows dedicated to a celebration of women in the service of the RAF, making it the perfect venue for the occasion. The weekend concluded with the laying of a wreath at the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park.

“The opportunity to reconnect with people who understand what it is to serve, particularly those who were members of the WRAF, is extremely important,” said WRAF Branch President, Group Captain Anne-Marie Houghton OBE.

The second part of the WRAF75 celebrations took place at All Saints Church in Down Ampney in July. A service included special prayers and a poem for women in the RAF.

Representatives with the Standards from



several Association branches, the WAAF, WRAF, RAF(W) Association and the Parachute Regiment were also in attendance. Wreaths were laid both at the church and the nearby airfield which had formerly been part of RAF Down Ampney.

The day concluded with a picnic, where members enjoyed spotting aircraft displaying at RIAT, which was taking place close by.

Trishia Welsh, one of the project leads on WRAF75, said: “All former members of the WRAF, and those who currently serve, have every reason to be proud of not only their own individual records of service, but the legacy of achievements they inherited and those which are to come. They have come a long way, and the path is open to even greater things.”

Above: A special service took place at St Clement Danes church to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the WRAF

“From the moment we landed it was all action”

Ron Cave recalls a clandestine operation in the Suez Canal Zone



RON CAVE joined the RAF as a national serviceman from 1949 to 1954. He is a member of the Association's Headquarters Branch.

IN 1952, I WAS seconded to a group drawn from many different trades all over the Suez Canal Zone and sworn to secrecy. We had a name which has long since faded from my memory, although I believe it was Operation 21, or something like that.

Every few weeks, the phone would ring and a voice would say, “Operation 21”. That was my cue to immediately pack up work and head for RAF Fayid. There we would gather for a couple of days to train for this mysterious operation.

I was there as a wireless fitter, and later I learnt what it was all about. If the military situation in the country had seriously deteriorated, the plan was to take over Cairo Airport, the government radio stations and the railway. A contingent of the RAF Regiment and the Red Berets were to be parachuted in to secure the main buildings and the runways. Our group of about 15 would then fly in to set up, in the middle of the airfield, three 60-foot aerial masts along with aerials, a mobile transmitter and receiver station.

Our training was to ensure we could do this quickly and efficiently. We had to hump a lot of equipment off the aircraft, assemble it and get it working. Erecting the large aerial masts with all the associated wire guy ropes was the most difficult part. We had to learn how to splice wire rope together in case of breakages. Good teamwork was paramount. Eventually we got to be very good at it.

One evening, just as I was leaving the NAAFI and thinking of having an early night, a call came on the telephone: “Operation 21!”

Arriving at RAF Fayid, we saw familiar faces packing generators, radios, aerial masts and battery boxes into a Valetta transport aircraft. We found spaces among the limited seating – the centre section had been cleared for equipment, which was all chained to the floor – and the flight check began.



Suddenly, smoke began pouring from a battery box, which was quickly unchained and thrown out of the door where ground crew doused it in foam. Whoever had screwed down the wooden lid had trapped two wires, creating the intense heat which very shortly would have burst into flames. It was hurriedly replaced.

After a few hours flying in an unknown direction we bumped down onto a cracked airport runway. From the moment we landed it was all action. We each had a job to do – speed, accuracy and silence were our watchwords. We nearly lost one aerial mast through overzealous tugging from one corner, but with hearts in mouths the men on the other three corners managed to hold it.

The equipment was stacked, the cables connected, the generator with its silencing box started and contact made: “Operation 21 calling base!”

“Well done, lads,” said our Squadron Leader, clicking a stopwatch. “Forty minutes, that’s a record. By the way, you’re in Cyprus, RAF Nicosia and you’ve just completed Exercise South Pacific. Let’s have a cup of tea.”

Next morning at breakfast we were congratulated again and thanked for all the hard work we had put in over the previous eight months. The debrief ended with the words: “Unfortunately, we won’t be needing you anymore. We heard an hour ago that the crisis is over, and that King Farouk of Egypt abdicated... at 8pm last night!”

Top right: The Valetta aircraft which took Ron to RAF Nicosia

A **Your stories**
Want to share a story from your own RAF service? Email airmail@rafa.org.uk or write to the HQ address on p6.

letters

IN THIS SECTION Share your stories, memories and thoughts with your fellow members

A humble hero

As a member of the RAF Association I received an email [in the April members' e-newsletter] which contained an article on former Association member Norman Jackson. I was so pleased to read this article, as not only was Norman a hero in the skies, but also on the ground.

My father, Flight Sergeant Dennis James Salt, was in 578 Squadron. During a raid over Stuttgart his aircraft was shot down, and on parachuting out Dad was shot in the legs and subsequently captured. He was taken to a German military hospital where both legs

were amputated before being taken to a prison camp.

Norman Jackson was the first person to introduce himself to Dad, saying that he should call him 'Jacko', and he told Dad that he would look after him.

Norman helped Dad a lot as he could not get around by himself, he even carried Dad on his back and continued to do this until another prisoner made Dad two legs out of tin cans.

Dad was eventually repatriated after being exchanged for a German prisoner. Norman really was a hero.

LORRAINE HULLETT

Meet the newest centenarian member

Vera 'Liz' Lawrenson

VERA LAWRENSON, known as Liz, celebrated her 100th birthday in May. A longstanding member of the Association's Huntingdon and District Branch, Liz regularly attended social evenings and celebratory dinners until recently.

During the war Liz worked in Whitehall on special despatches, then moved to Grosvenor Place dealing with POW repatriation. In January 1945 she married Lesley Lawrenson, an RAF instrument maker who served at RAF Melksham and with 83 Pathfinder Squadron at RAF Coningsby. Lesley passed away in 1981.

Liz's birthday party was attended by 80 guests, at which she gave a thank-you speech to all present.



A To comment in or contribute to Air Mail please email airmail@rafa.org.uk

Alternatively, write to The 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 next issue is 1 November.**



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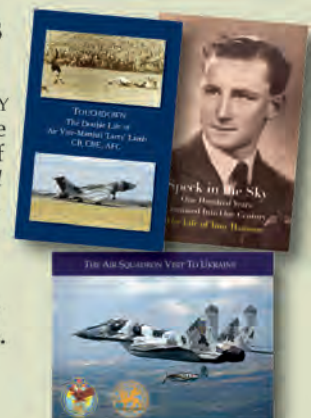
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LAUGH OR FLY

By: Peter Hart and Gary Bain

Publisher:

Pen & Sword

Price: RRP £25

The airmen of the Royal Flying Corps during WWI moved

between safety and danger in a matter of hours. On the ground they were cloistered in simple but adequate accommodation several miles behind the lines, and even blessed with beds and blankets. Farmhouses, barns and huts were used, but they were all far better than the squalor faced by the infantry in the trenches. Airmen could set up a decent mess in which to socialise and entertain and enjoyed visits to nearby towns.

In stark contrast, when taking to the air death lurked all around, zooming out of the sun, or bursting from the clouds. A moment's loss of concentration, or tactical blunder, could see them plummet thousands of feet to the ground. But better than a punctured petrol tank engulfing the aircraft in flame. *Laugh or Fly* looks at the lives of those airmen caught in this world of dichotomies, and the dreadful psychological strain it created.

20% off for Association members at rafa.org.uk/hart or by calling 01226 734 222 with discount code RAFA20. Valid until 31 December 2024.

SPYING ON THE KREMLIN

By: Mike Murtagh

Publisher:

Pen & Sword

Price: RRP £28

Mike Murtagh has had a gun stuck in his face, been seconds from

a mid-air collision, been struck by lightning in an aircraft, made two emergency landings, had a sniper-sight trained on him, been the target of at least one honeytrap, nearly bled to death in India, been threatened by people working for the Azeri Mafia, worked on a movie with three Oscar-winners and may have inadvertently eaten someone.

Spying on the Kremlin details the background and unintentional turning points in the life of a working-class boy, whose journey took him from an austere 1950s South Wales to the political theatre of The Kremlin and beyond. As an RAF officer and a diplomat, Mike's experiences of living and working in Russia have given him valuable insights into the Russian psyche, as well as the workings and capabilities of the Russian military that still have currency and relevance today.

20% off plus free P&P for Association members at rafa.org.uk/murtagh or by calling 01226 734 222 with discount code RAFA20. Valid until 31 December 2024.

F-35 IN SERVICE

By: Gérard Keijsper

Publisher:

Air World

Price: RRP £35

The origins of the F-35 and the challenges the industry

had to overcome go back to a still-secret NATO study that evaluated the vulnerability of air force bases in the West.

This spurred development for Short Take off and Vertical Landing (STOVL) fighter aircraft. Only two aircraft with this capability actually entered service: the British Harrier and the Russian Yak-38. However,

these lacked supersonic capability, which made them vulnerable to faster fighters.

A programme was therefore initiated to find a supersonic STOVL fighter. The trail of unsuccessful attempts was long, with NASA, defence agencies and private industry all studying advanced STOVL propulsion ideas with no tangible result – until a design was put forward by Lockheed Martin that resulted in the F-35.

This richly illustrated book is a study of the F-35 in service, which, in Lockheed Martin's own words, is the most lethal, survivable, and connected fighter jet in the world.

20% off for Association members at rafa.org.uk/keijsper or by calling 01226 734 222 with discount code RAFA20. Valid until 31 December 2024.

INSIDEAIR

Produced for the RAF by RAF Media Reserves

InsideAIR is an audio podcast offering a

'behind the wire' view of the RAF, its people, technology and operations.

With more than 90 episodes and counting, it covers a diverse range of RAF-related topics. From the RAF's role in space, to helping with COVID testing, the work of the Tactical Medical Wing, the evolution of force protection, air policing in Romania, protecting RAF secrets while on and off duty, the future of RAF reservists and much more.

Episodes can be listened to via a podcast app or online. To listen online visit rafa.org.uk/insideair



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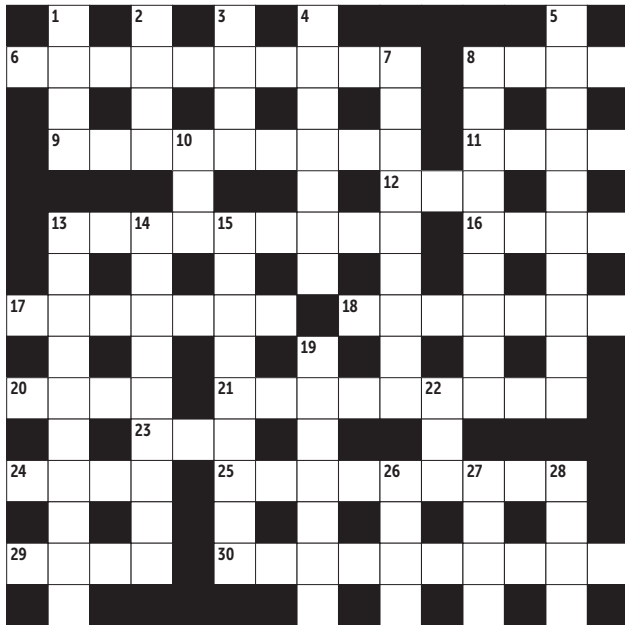
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Crossword

The Autumn crossword

By Enigma



ACROSS

- 6 Skill of rescuing people from drowning (4-6)
 8 £25 (4)
 9 Existing only for a day (9)
 11 Extra humane part of demon that swallows the sun and moon at eclipses (4)
 12 The '.' in '.com' (3)
 13 Writer Daphne - - (2,7)
 16 Ceremonial form sounds about right (4)
 17 Engage deeply with troublesome Eastern mimers (7)
 18 Dishonestly (7)
 20 Ado (4)
 21 The state of being obscene (9)
 23 Their Royal Highnesses (1,1,1)
 24 Celebrity meets rodents running back (4)
 25 Will statement change? (9)
 29 Small drink of whisky (4)
 30 Time for 'All Our ??' (10)

DOWN

- 1&7 What my true love gave me after 4 French hens (4,4,5)
 2 A network trap (4)
 3 Hot conflict on the motorway (4)
 4 Bombardment from above (3,4)
 5 Enjoying a lively period of drinking and dancing (2,3,5)
 7 see 1 down
 8 Christmas pear-tree bird (9)
 10 Time for a little dance rave (3)
 13 No 617 Squadron was/is known as 'The ??' (10)
 14 Lame storm could cause powerful whirlpool (9)
 15 Displeasing to the eye (9)
 19 Obtain sheriff's helpers on steamship (7)
 22 Short nominal name (3)
 26 Mostly turn aside to declare positively (4)
 27 Note concerning the school (4)
 28 Trifles with playthings (4)

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Quiz

Ever wondered just how good your RAF-related knowledge was?
Why not pit your wits against our quizmasters and find out?

1 Which RAF station is now home to the Imperial War Museum?

2 What year was 6 Cyber Reserve Squadron created?

3 Fly south for 240 miles from RAF Akrotiri until you reach a coastline, then head south-west for 135 miles. Which famous landmark do you see below?

4 See picture:
Which aircraft is shown?

5 'Mr Bagel Toes' is an anagram of which current RAF aircraft?

6 See picture:
Which RAF station is this?

7 Which six countries border the Black Sea?

8 See picture:
Which aircraft is shown?

9 Which helicopter exercise recently took place at RAF Leeming?



10 Which RAF station has a French motto meaning: 'Only the beginning is difficult'?

11 Who founded the RAF Mountain Rescue Service in 1943?

12 See picture:
Which aircraft is shown?

13 Which 1939 RAF battle convinced Bomber Command to switch to night bombing?

14 Which recent Operation saw 19 RAF Reservists take part?

15 Which RAF station was transferred to the Army in 2012, becoming Kendrew Barracks?

16 See picture:
Which aircraft is shown?

A If you enjoy a quizzing challenge, why not pit yourself against our 256-page RAF Association Puzzle Book?

Available at rafa.org.uk/rafapuzzle or by calling **0800 018 2361**. Buying direct from the Association helps raise funds for our vital welfare and wellbeing work with the RAF community.

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



| | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mr W Alexander | Ayr and Prestwick | Wing Commander W Fleetwood | Caduceus |
| Mr A Allenby | Global | | (Medical Services) |
| Mrs J Amos | Lincoln | Mr W P Fouracre | 1066 |
| Mr P Anderson | Basingstoke | Mr J Gallagher | Peterhead |
| Mr C Antink | Wokingham and Woodley | Mr T Gamble | Northwich |
| Mr P Arengo-Jones OBE | Swiss | Mr M Garner | Newcastle and Gateshead |
| Mr D Atkins | Amsterdam | Mr G D Gillott | Sheffield |
| Wing Commander B Bage | South Shields | Squadron Leader M Gilson | Rushden |
| Mr P Bartlett | Burtonwood and Warrington | Mr P Gingell | Aylesbury and Halton |
| Mr R Bastable | Fareham | Mr J Given | Perth |
| Mr G Bell | Norwich | Mr B Green | Exmouth |
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| Mr M M Bulloch | Peterhead | Mr R Holliday | Penrith RMG |
| Mr W Burie | Belgian | Mr R H Horton | Basingstoke |
| Mr A Burns | Silloth | Mr B Howarth | Wallasey |
| Mr I Cairns | Doncaster | Mr D Hudson | Dereham and Swaffham |
| Mr D Cann | Headquarters | Mr W Hughes | Gloucester |
| Mr D Chapman | Headquarters | Mr M Jenkins | Headquarters |
| Mr A J Chorlton | Manchester and District | Mr D Johns | Republic of Ireland |
| Mr W Cochrane | Causeway Coast | Wing Commander M Jones OBE | Exmouth |
| Mr A Coe | Romford | Mr D Jupp | Armourers |
| Mrs I Collins | Headquarters | Mr T Keyes | Harrow District |
| Mr D Cookson | Headquarters | Mr G Kidman | Formby |
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| Mrs M O'Sullivan | Grantham | Mr M Weeks | Letchworth and Hitchin |
| Ms. M Ouzman | WRAF | Mr B Westbrook | Maidstone |
| Mr D Owen | Llanidloes | Mr M Whincup | Grantham |
| Group Captain G Parry | 1066 | Mr M Whittington | Fareham |
| Mr K Peart | Whitley Bay | Mr D Whittle | Haywards Heath |
| Mr K Pentland | Kenley and Caterham | Squadron Leader A Wilkinson | Dursley and South Gloucestershire |
| Mr C Pettican | Witham and Rivenhall | Mr D Winder | Tamworth |
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| Squadron Leader J Stone | Weston-super-Mare | | |

"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."

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.

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

| | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Mr R Bannerman | Corsham and Chippenham | Mr S Heaton | Headquarters |
| Mr D Christopher | Headquarters | Mrs G Lewis | Headquarters Branch |
| Mr H Durman | Barry and the Vale | Mr M Robinson | York |
| Mr M Franklin | Bury St Edmunds | Mr F Smith | Mid-Somerset |
| Mr R Froom | Mid-Somerset | Mr K Souter | Kenley and Caterham |
| Mr R Gray | Hartlepool | | |

Notices

Stay connected with RAF and RAF Association friends:
Your members-only service for reunions, research and more

Old comrades

Wing Commander Kiran 'Kojak' Bhatt wishes to get in touch with any descendants of his father's wartime friends. His father, **Saravu Kukkemane Ramachandra 'Zozo' Bhat**, was seconded to the RAF in 1943 to fly Hurricanes and Spitfires. His friends were: David Prosser, Frank and Dorothy Ogden of Harrogate, Peggy Dixon (married name) of Morpeth, and the Sutcliffe and Allins families in Nantwich. The Allins later moved to Montreal in Canada. If you can help, please contact Kiran at kopterkojak@gmail.com.

Reunions

The **RAF Boy Entrants 42nd Telegs Association's** final reunion will be held from Monday 28 April to Thursday 1 May 2025. The venue is going to be Telford Hotel and Golf Resort, Great Hay Drive, Sutton Heights, Telford, Shropshire, TF7 4DT. Visit 42entrytelegs.co.uk or contact John Lewis (chairman) at jaslmlewis@aol.com for more information.

Other

Reaching out to aircrew members who were awarded the coveted RAF E brevet to invite you to become members of the **Flight Engineer/Air Engineer Association**. If you are interested in joining, please contact the membership secretary via the Association website at raffaeaa.com. The next reunion and formal dinner will be held in the Wiltshire area on 26-27 October 2024.

Calling **A-W/H-S Argosy aircrew and groundcrew**. I am writing a detailed history of the Argosy, to be published by Air-Britain in 2025, and would like to hear from anyone who had first-hand experience with

this aircraft or has photographs of the Argosy. Please contact Chris Hobson on 01285 711 768 or email chobson208@gmail.com.



The **At Risk War Memorials Project** invites Association members to learn about its fascinating work by visiting atriskwarmemorials.co.uk. The project, which covers Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, rescues war memorials at risk of loss or damage from closed or deserted buildings, and encourages local

communities to learn about the people behind the names and how to conserve memorials in their own area. To receive the project's quarterly e-newsletter *Last Post*, email mail@atriskwarmemorials.co.uk.

A Submit your notices – free for all members

Notices is a free RAF Association member 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 **1 November**. Make sure to include an email address and/or telephone number in your message so readers can contact you, and please clearly state that your notice is 'for publication'. This is a service for members only.

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>3 Warm 4 Air raid 5 On the tiles 7 Gold Rings 8 Partridge 10 Era 13 Dambusters 14 Maelstrom 15 Unsightly 19 Possess 22 Nom 26 Aver 27 Eton 28 Toys</p> | <p>13 Du Maurier 16 Rite 17 Immerse 18 Snidely 20 Fuss 21 Grossness 23 TRH 24 Star 25 Testament 29 Dram 30 Yesterdays</p> | <p>11 Flight Lieutenant 12 George Graham 12 Fairey Swordfish 13 Heligoland Bight 14 Op Biloxi 15 RAF Cottesmore 16 Shadow R1</p> | <p>Solution: Quiz</p> <p>1 RAF Duxford 2 2021 3 The Great Pyramid 4 of Giza 5 Wildcat AH1 6 Globemaster 7 RAF Gibraltar 8 Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine 9 A US Air Force 10 Osprey 11 Hades Warrior 12 RAF Cosford</p> |
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