

Branch
Membership

187

ROYAL AIR FORCES Association

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RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH



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RAFAGEN

The official newsletter of the Letchworth & District
Branch of the Royal Air Forces' Association



ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2020

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Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin

RAFAGEN Edited by Ken Needham (contact 01462671534)

Monthly Meetings are held at the Letchworth Rugby Club, Baldock Road, Letchworth Garden City Herts (Behind the Letchworth Leisure Centre) on the 3rd Monday of each month at 19.45 hrs. Licensed Bar & Ample Parking

NAAFI BREAK is held at the Par 3 Golf Centre, William Way, Letchworth Garden City on the 1st Tuesday of each month 10.00 hrs 'til 12.00 hrs

**Message from our
Chairman, Warrant
Officer Shaun Griffin**



Serving in the Royal Air Force I am often reminded of the Service of people given in the greater good of the community for the health and wellbeing of others. I have personally visited a great many RAF personnel this year employed on CSUs (COVID Support Units), always the unique RAF pride, ethos and culture are fully evident. MACA (Military Aid to Civil Authorities) isn't a new thing, the Government have historically called on the Armed Forces to assist with crisis and

events such as, Olympics Games, foot and mouth outbreaks and flood disaster relief. Deployed on to the streets of Birmingham and Liverpool has tested our people, but always they prevailed, maintaining our Services reputation for excellence.

This pandemic has stretched the resources of charities and support networks to their absolute limits, I'm amazed at the charity and Christian values of the human race during these times. Our branch is no different, our small band of volunteers has been active pretty much the whole year, this despite many of them still holding down a full-time job, most are experiencing personal difficulties as a result of the pandemic, and some have very sadly endured bereavement in their own families. It's fair to say, I'm proud and extremely grateful for each of your parts in maintaining our Branch, that might be running a website, producing the excellent RAFAGEN, sending supporting emails, making telephone calls, keeping Branch finances running, or dropping off vital supplies to those not able to fend for themselves, the list goes on... Thank you.

So as we all track the roll out of the vaccine, indeed I hope that some will now, as you read this, have received your first inoculation jab. We must view the future with hope and with an eye on getting back to normality, how many times has that phrase been used this year? But return we must, I seek your active support of the Branch when H.Q. and the Government give us the green light, kick starting our Branch activity will not be easy, but I know once you all feel safe, you will ensure our Branch enjoys a 2021 which is as close as we can make it to normality. I'll close by wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and COVID free New Year.

Shaun

Since Shaun wrote the above we have moved into Tier 3, and with it all the problems that brings forth.

A personal plea from me is to keep yourself safe and don't take chances.

The virus is not pleasant, no matter how mild a dose you have, and I speak from personal experience. Don't take chances. The Ministers this time have not said that the over 70's must stay indoors, but unless you have to please DON'T. The only way we are going to beat this pandemic is to obey the rules, and get the vaccine as soon as possible.

I know the media are saying that the younger generation are not adhering to the rules, but after walking around these past few days, it is not just the youngsters, all age groups are the same.

Remember, wash your hands often. If you go into a shop use the hand sanitiser. Always wear your face mask out of your home, and keep your distance.

If you need assistance or just someone to have a chat to, my number is below

Ken Needham (01462 671534)



PADRE'S HOUR

A few words from our branch Padre,
Reverend Canon Lindsay Dew

December 2020

Hello everyone, the last Sunday of the church's year is called Christ the King – a kind of Church New Year's Eve. The Gospel reading was from Matthew's Gospel and we heard the story from Jesus about how at the judgement people will be divided as a shepherd divides sheep from goats. The sheep will be rewarded because they are the ones who helped the needy, visited the sick or the prisoner, gave food to the hungry and water to the thirsty, and welcomed the stranger – in the church these 6 acts of compassion are called acts of mercy and over time the act of burying the dead was added. Seven acts of mercy are the standard by which we shall be judged. But in a complex and needy world how can we possibly give or even be everything to everyone in need? In better times when we are free to be out and about more as part of our daily lives how do we respond to those we see begging on the streets of Cambridge or Stevenage. How can we keep these words of Jesus in our hearts and allow them to influence and direct our lives in such a way as to show the reality of bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth. I don't think for a moment that Jesus is saying we must do all of these acts of mercy, nor can we realistically give to everyone in need. But rather, I think, that Jesus is calling for a change of heart – that we become more compassionate, more sympathetic, more responsive to those in need. No one of us can feed **all** the hungry, or bring drink to **all** the thirsty, no one of us can visit **all** those who are sick or in hospital, no one of us can welcome **all** the strangers. But it bothered me when I lived in Yorkshire when I would pass people on the street in Leeds who were obviously in need. I couldn't help them all, I couldn't give to all – and the question I suppose for me and maybe for all of us is to ask 'would it do any good anyway if I could?' In the end I decided that I would do what I could. In those days the odd 20p would go much further than today, so I used to change a pound or how ever much I could afford and just give 20p to people as I came across them. When the money was gone, it was gone and I just had to say 'I'm sorry but I've given all I can today'. 20p wouldn't go so far today so maybe it needs to be 50p. But we can only spend what we have, not what we don't have. We have other God given responsibilities such as our families and to see them go

hungry because we were busy feeding the hungry outside would be just as much a failure and maybe even more. I said on Sunday ‘charity begins at home – but it must not be allowed to stay there’. The words of Jesus’s are a reminder of his call to be compassionate and merciful.

Another way of giving help is to help the charities whose aim is to help those in need. In Cambridge a new charity started up a few years ago called Street Aid – they invite donations centrally and that is then used to help move people off the streets or to gain employment. So rather than giving money to an individual person and it’s not known if that is going to support a drug or drink habit, the donation is used to better effect. The donation is used by those with experience and understanding to bring about the best outcome for all in need. There are plenty of others of course, including Jimmy’s or Emmaus, Cambridge, The Salvation Army. Not forgetting, of course, food banks which are local to us and donations to them go a long way to helping out immediate neighbours. They need people to support them in their work to bring dignity and self respect to people who have lost everything.

There are lots of ways we can follow the words of Jesus to be the kind of people he invites us to be – not to avoid his searching judgement but rather because we are allowing his words to influence and direct our lives.

Traditionally the last Sunday of the church’s used to be better known as Stir Up Sunday when the Collect asked God to stir up in us our wills to do good works. In time it also became associated with stirring up Christmas puddings, so that as the mixture was stirred up in the bowl so we asked to be stirred up, disturbed to do good works.

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by you be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Whether you are someone with a faith or not, I am more than happy to be contacted if you think I can offer support and friendship, help or advice. I will usually be at the monthly Branch meetings and the NAAFI Break, (once they re-start) as well as serving on the Committee. For the time being you can ring me on 07545878082 or email me at my new address lindsaychalesdew@gmail.com

Kind regards & blessings
Lindsay (Revd Canon Lindsay Dew)



REQUIRE THE SERVICES OF OUR WELFARE OFFICER?

Here are the contact details of the branch Welfare Officer :-



Mark Howell

Tel :-07874015229

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CHRISTMAS MILITARY STORIES

US Navy Story

Santa Can't Come Aboard

It was a really slack duty day. No maintenance planned (besides the dailies). Only minimal cleanup done. If you weren't on watch, you were in the Crew's Mess watching Christmas movies, like Die Hard and Lethal Weapon.

We also had the best Navy meal I ever had. Our MS2 (Mess Specialist, 2nd Class, E-5) took the duty that day. One of the oddities of the Navy - if you're a cook, the higher you get in rank, the less you actually cook. This guy spent most of his time doing paperwork and serving the officers in his he Ward Room. I think he took the duty that day because he could actually COOK!

And then, Santa Claus came to the boat. He walked across the brow, saluted the colors and the topside watch, and requested permission to come aboard.

Unfortunately, he couldn't. He wasn't on our sub's access list. The topside watch called the OoD, who tried to get in touch with the Captain, but had no luck. So we had to send him away.

He just shrugged and went to the Australian sub that was tied up on the other side of the pier.

“Santa” was actually a retired Senior Chief submariner who had married a Japanese woman and settled there after he retired. He'd put on his Santa suit and visit the subs every Christmas, handing out candy canes and such. One of the guys asked him if he visited the surface ships. “F*** skimmers!” said Santa. (Surface ships are “skimmers” because they just skim along the surface. They're also called Targets. “There are two kinds of ships. Submarines and targets.”)

US Air Force Story

A Lt who didn't like to salute.

This happened roughly 12 years ago, so I apologize for any fuzzy details. I just discovered this sub and this story immediately came to mind.

Long story short, I had an Lt who hated saluting. During our deployment training, he would regularly find himself walking down the road, only to have about 100 or of his airmen coming right towards him. Single file line with plenty of spacing. Ready to salute. One by one. If he crossed to the other side of the road, we would all run and reposition. We loved messing with him and he was a great sport about it. Probably one of my favorite officers I had worked with.

One day he decided to get creative and walk backwards to avoid eye contact and 100 back to back salutes.

But That didn't deter us one bit.

You can imagine 1 lonely Lt walking backwards, saluting 100 troops, also walking backwards.

Then some crusty 20 year major saw us having fun and that was that.

US Army Story

I had just finished giving an NBC (Nuclear, Biological and Chemical) class to my unit about the "specialty" chemical equipment like the M22 spectrograph, and one of the KATUSA soldiers come up to me. Let's call him... Kim (because literally half the KATUSA in our unit were named Kim)

Kim: "I have a question, what is the difference between airborne and aerosol?"

I then go into a lengthy explanation about propellants, the difference between the chemical and biological meanings, etc. He seems to be getting more confused by the minute.

Kim: "So the people... are suspended in the air? What about the plane?"

He had asked me the difference between AIRBORNE and AIR ASSAULT.

R.A.F. CEYLON

A story about the perfect time I had whilst posted in Ceylon, and what happened nearly 70 years later by Ken Needham

In 1957 I found myself on the island of what was then known as Ceylon. I was posted on the island as a R.A.F. Police dog handler to guard the R.A.F. Stations, (and naval units) on the island, but my main base was R.A.F. Negombo, and this was to be my home for the next two and a half years. All I knew of Ceylon was from my schools days and that was not a lot. It consisted about the port of Colombo and that tea grew there. Two and a half years later I was to leave a lot more knowledgeable about the country, and lots of memories of a wonderful time.

In the following decades I never forgot about my time on the island, but did keep those dreams to myself. That was until I was invited to join a group of ex RAF police officers who had spent part of their service life on the island of Ceylon. The group, known as the Old Ceylon Comrades, met every year for a re union and we all went down memory lane. This was heaven.

At the re-union in 2006, the Old Ceylon Comrades asked me if I would organise a re visit to the island for what was then a small group, and see if I could arrange a visit to the old RAF station of Negombo, now Sri Lankan Air Force Katunayake. So it was in September 2007, twenty-two Old Ceylon Comrades, their wives and friends, armed with an invitation to visit our old camp, we began what was to be a journey of a life time.

I must admit that when we boarded the plane at Heathrow I was a little apprehensive as to what I had let everyone in for. I hadn't chosen the most expensive package in the tour brochure, far from it in fact, we were getting two weeks for the price of one. For all I knew the hotel could be a log cabin at the end of the runway. Oh well, too late now, we are on our way.

When we touched down at the Bandaranayke Airport, we were all a little tired, for very few had slept during the flight. This didn't show as we were back, and we weren't going to let a little tiredness spoil the event. This modern, well equipped airport certainly wasn't here 60 years ago. At that time the larger passenger aircraft were just coming into service, and Ratnamala Airport, which was the main Colombo airport, had too smaller runway to take these new monsters, so the new larger planes landed at R.A.F. Negombo. I may be wrong, but it looked like the same runway. Only the surface is in a much better state.

Getting through all chores of entering the country was very simple, and it seemed no time at all, before we were being greeted with garlands of orchids. As we walked from the airport to the waiting coach to take us to the Brown's Beach Hotel in Negombo, it was no use trying to work out where we were. I seemed to remember that this side of the runway was the camp rifle range and beyond that a pineapple plantation. (Say no more about that plantation) None of us were expecting the place not to have changed. As a matter of fact we would have been disappointed if it had not advanced in 50 years. But deep down we wanted something to bring back those wonderful memories.

We were told by our tour representative that the journey to the hotel would take about half a hour. I don't remember it taking that long when we went from the camp to the Negombo beach near to the New Negombo Rest House. I was younger and fitter in those days so perhaps I only thought it was a short distance.

Once away from the airport and on to the main Colombo to Chilaw road, which is now a dual carriageway, we still could not recognise any landmarks. Yet we knew we were back. The scenery had that "Sinhalese" look. Gone had the houses made of Coconut Palm branches, and they have been replaced by substantial concrete or brick buildings, which was good to see. The shops although replaced by a more substantial building, the way the wares were displayed was as they were all those years ago. This is what to me gave it that "Sinhalese" feel to the place. Not all shops were in this

traditional style, a number had modern shop fronts, and it wouldn't surprise me if these shops had air conditioning, something we were to learn is a 'must'. We are at least 50 years older and cannot take to the heat as we did before. Although I was to be proved wrong by a few members of the group. As the air conditioned coach pulled into the hotel entrance we still couldn't recognise any landmarks, but we still had 15 days to find them, if they were still there.

When we left the coach we were greeted by the senior staff of the Brown's Beach Hotel, and again garlanded, this time with local shells. As we turned to enter the building, two very smart uniformed airmen gave us a trumpet fanfare. What a welcome, but it was far from over. Sleep would have to wait for a few hours.

Once into the hotel foyer we were offered a very welcome drink of fresh orange, just what was required. The next surprise was to be invited to light the Large Oil Lamp. What a welcome we were being given. The rest of the hotel guest were asking who we were. I think they thought that someone famous had arrived. All that was left to do now was to register into the hotel. Did I say 'all that was left to do'? The welcoming wasn't over yet. Attached to our registration cards was personal invitation from the management and staff of the hotel to a private cocktail party at 19.00 hrs.

The party was like something out of a Hollywood movie. A warm evening, naked flames lighting the area of the party, the Indian Ocean breaking on the beach in the distance, wonderful Sinhalese cocktails and the friendly atmosphere of the people we were with. Now I know how film stars live.

The party over, it was now time to catch up on a little sleep, after all we had not been to bed since Saturday night, and tonight was Monday. What had happened to Sunday? Who cared? We were back on the island that we all loved so much, and what a reception we had received.

Day two was to be a free day for us to do and go where we pleased. I needed to get my bearing as to whereabouts in Negombo we were, plus I needed a couple of items from a general store.

One of our party, together with his wife, are regular visitors to Sri Lanka, and was able to pass on a little local knowledge. It was suggested that we might like to visit 'Food City'. This was a chain of stores owned by Cargills. Now that was a name from the past. I remember Cargills as being a very large departmental store in Colombo. I used to shop there quite a bit, buying items to take home to England. "The departmental store is still in same place, but the company have now opened up a number of grocery stores up and down the country." It was explained.

To get to this store would mean travelling in a "Tut Tut". Now this was to be a new experience. This is one form of transport that was around in 1957. "Just ask any driver to take you where you want to go, but agree a price first", came the good advise from Dennis, the regular visitor. Once out of the hotel boundary, Tuk Tuk drivers appeared from nowhere. "How many passengers can one of these carry?" I asked, as my wife and I had been joined by another member of our group. Now this was a silly question because what I remember there used to be no limit as to the number of passengers rode on a pedal cycle, motor cycle, bus or train. If there was room, inside or out, you climbed aboard. "Three, no problem" said our driver with the shake of his head. No problem for him he was sitting in the front. At least I was to be squashed between two ladies.

Tut Tuts are plentiful on the roads of Sri Lanka now, but 50 years ago it was the Bullock cart, plodding its way down the road at the only speed it knew. Slow. At least the Tuk Tuk is faster as it weaves in and out of the heavy traffic, very rarely stopping at road junctions, just filtering in. As we rode in our Tuk Tuk you realised that there was a lot more traffic on the roads. Cars were more plentiful. The lorries with the gaily painted bodies were the



same as 50 years ago. They could have been the same lorries. They were in good condition then as they are today. Buses are still around, and very well used. Just one thing, and I have referred to it earlier. Everyone today sits inside the bus. In the late 1950's I was always fascinated by the way passengers hung to the sides of the bus. This also applied to the trains. I did however, notice that pedal cycle and motor cycles were prone to multiple passengers both now and 50 years ago.

This was my first full day of my return, and if I had been asked what was the biggest change I had found so far I would have to say, 'the people'. In 1957 the islanders seemed to be very nervous to speak to us. We found that the only time they would speak was in the course of our duties or when they were trying to sell their wares. This did not apply to everyone, as I made some very good friends amongst the locals, but in the main they seemed a very shy race of people. Not today. The people are friendly and polite. Everyone will speak to you. From a simple "Good morning" or "Hi-boan" (Sinhalese greeting) to a long conversation about England or if they knew I had been here before, the past. The people have become a very friendly nation. It is wonderful.

Today we are going to visit the Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawala. This is a tourist attraction that was not here in the old days, so this

venture was something new to all of us. We had hired an air-conditioned coach, a must for us Europeans. We made our way up towards Pinnawala, the tour guide explaining items of interest as we passed. A pineapple plantation, for example as our wives had never seen a pineapple growing before. They only see them on Supermarket shelves back home. The coach pulled into the side of the road to show us some bats. Yes bats. You may recall that in the 1950's a film was made in Ceylon, a very famous film, and this type of bat had a part in that production. The film was 'Bridge on the River Kwai', and in one scene thousands of these bats took to the air. The cameraman tells the story that he had to set up his cameras under the trees in which the bats were roosting. He would set the cameras rolling and then there would be a noise which would make the bats take flight. All went according to plan, except for one thing. No-one had told the cameraman that when the bats took to the air they emptied their bowels. He was underneath.

Bridge on the River Kwai gave work to a lot a people on the island at that time, as well as the British servicemen on the camps, and I believe the valley in which the bridge was built is now on some tour guides. That pleasure will have to wait until my next visit to the island.

What an experience to see all these elephants in a semi-wild state, being cared for as they are. In the 1950's elephants were working animals, although I do understand that some of these have to earn their keep. We would meet them strolling down the roads going to and from their place of work. To me they are a beautiful animal, and to see them bathing in the river was unbelievable. I have seen them many times on travel programmes on



British television, and seen pictures in holiday magazines, but nothing is like seeing it in real life. I have one moment from this visit to the Elephant Orphanage which I will treasure for the rest of my life. I have seen an adult elephant sit down and slide down the side of a hill like a child. I know no one will believe me when I get back home, but I have the proof on film. Two of our party are coming back to ride an elephant. I'll cry out of that one. I suffer from very bad vertigo.

Now we are off to a spice garden. I have heard of herb gardens, but a spice garden is a new one on me. I enjoyed this visit. It was nice to see the spices growing instead of just being in spice jars in the kitchen. We had a very good head massage whilst we were here. Make a note "go back for another head massage".

The next port of call was to a Tea Factory. I had visited a tea factory many years ago, and the principle has not changed. The difference being that my first visit was to a plantation run by the brother of one of our RAF Police auxiliaries. The one we went to time was purely for the tourist. Nevertheless it was a nice visit.

When we arrived back at the hotel, the coach was met by the owner who had heard that we were RAF personnel from 50 years ago. He was most upset not to have found out before we went as he said he could have arranged something better for us. I don't know what, but it made us feel good to think that we were that important.

The next day we were off to the camp. We were all wondering what the day would bring. Let us hope that I have not built up the visit too much.

The story continues in the next issue of
RAFAGEN



Guardroom 1957



Guardroom 2007

PANDEMICS OF # THE 20th CENTURY

We all know that the pandemic that we are going through is the first of the 21st Century, but do you know how many pandemics there was in the 20th Century?

We all know of the Spanish flu of 1918, when 40,000,000 to 50,000,000 died of the disease, but can you recall of anymore? Well, there were two more, and some of them within living memory.

Other than the one mentioned above, there were two more, 1957 and 1968. Do those dates help your memory? Let's have a look at the 1957 outbreak. This pandemic was so-called Asian flu, which took hold in 1957 and caused an estimated one million to two million deaths worldwide. As [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) notes, the 1957 Asian flu outbreak is "generally considered to have been the least severe of the three influenza pandemics of the 20th century". [New Scientist](#) reported the technical details stating that the 1957 pandemic was "triggered by the hybridisation of human H1 flu with flu viruses from birds which carried another surface protein, H2", which created a virus "more lethal than the then-circulating H1 strains because no human had ever encountered the H2 protein before, and so lacked any immunity to the new strain". (Not a Covid-19) in sight. An estimated 20 000 people in the UK died

The disease spread rapidly and was reported in Singapore in February, Hong Kong in April and the coastal cities of the US in the summer of 1957. However, a vaccine was developed by the autumn and rolled out worldwide, while the availability of antibiotics allowed doctors to treat people with secondary infections, limiting the spread and mortality.

Now the 1968 pandemic. The 1968 flu pandemic was a global outbreak of influenza that originated in China in July 1968 (Another originating in China), and lasted until 1969–70. The outbreak, which is sometimes called

the Hong Kong flu. The 1968 flu pandemic caused illness of varying degrees of severity in different populations.

Although the 1968 flu outbreak was associated with comparatively few deaths worldwide, the virus was highly [contagious](#), a factor that [facilitated](#) its rapid global dissemination. Indeed, within two weeks of its emergence in July in [Hong Kong](#), some 500,000 cases of illness had been reported, and the virus proceeded to spread swiftly throughout [Southeast Asia](#). Within several months it had reached the [Panama Canal Zone](#) and the United States, where it had been taken overseas by soldiers returning to California from Vietnam.

By the end of December, the virus had spread throughout the United States and had reached the United Kingdom and countries in western Europe. Australia, Japan, and multiple countries in Africa, eastern Europe, and Central and South America were also affected. The pandemic occurred in two waves. It was widespread and deadly in the United States. Infection caused upper respiratory symptoms typical of influenza and produced symptoms of chills, [fever](#), and muscle pain and weakness. These symptoms usually persisted for between four and six days. The highest levels of mortality were associated with the most susceptible groups, namely infants and the elderly. Although a [vaccine](#) was developed against the virus, it became available only after the pandemic had peaked in many countries. The H3N2 virus that caused the 1968 pandemic is still in circulation today and is considered to be a strain of seasonal influenza.

You will note that the three pandemics referred to above were all called “Flu”, were as the current one is simply known as the [Coronavirus](#), or Covid –19.

All the information above was taken from various sites on the World Wide Web, and therefore the author takes no responsibility for its accuracy.