

Branch
Membership

235

ROYAL AIR FORCES Association

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH

SUMMER

2021

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RAFAGEN

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

ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2021



Chairman:- W.O. Shaun Griffin

Vice Chairman:- Ken Needham

Secretary:- Marie Mahoney

(Contact:- secretary@rafa-lethworth.org.uk)

Treasurer:- Ken Needham

Wings Appeal Officer:- Ken Needham

Branch Welfare Officer: Mark Howell

Contact:- Tel :-07874015229 email :- markhowell65@gmail.com

**Membership Secretaries:- Shaun Griffin &
Ken Needham**

Branch Padre:- Rev. Canon Lindsay Dew

Contact details :- Tel :- 01462742165

email :- lindsaycharlesdew@gmail.com

General Committee:

Roy Newbury: John Airey ;

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

RAFAGEN Edited by Ken Needham

(email kwn056@btinternet.com Telephone 01462671534)

NAAFI BREAK is held at The Par 3 Golf Centre, Willian Way,
Letchworth Garden City on the last Wednesday of each month
10.00 hrs 'til 12.00 hrs

YOUR 2021/2 COMMITTEE



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Rev. Canon
Lindsay Dew



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**WINGS APPEAL
COORDINATOR**

Ken Needham & the
Committee



GENERAL COMMITTEE
Roy Newbury



GENERAL COMMITTEE
John Airey



GENERAL COMMITTEE
Headley Parkins

● Denotes Branch Trustees



Thank you. We couldn't do it without you

Dear fellow supporter of our RAF community,

I should like to take this opportunity to express my personal thanks to you for your efforts in support of the RAF Association. It has undoubtedly been hard not

being able to support people in need, raise funds, or undertake any of our other vital work face to face, but your commitment to getting the job done despite the challenges has been inspiring. The positive difference you make is very evident.

This past year has been difficult and, for many, your support has helped create a lifeline.

Thanks to you, over the past 12 months we have contacted over 30,000 potentially vulnerable members of our RAF community to check on their welfare. Together, we have supported over 4,000 welfare cases, each representing someone in urgent need. As a result of COVID restrictions, people quickly became lonely and isolated. Over 6,000 members of our RAF community have now been matched with a friend to talk to, through our new 'Connections For Life' service. These are just a few of the ways in which we have helped those in need.

The time you give (in myriad ways) directly contributes to making people happier. Their own words speak volumes about the impact you are having:

"...having some freedom back is GLORIOUS! Thank you all so very much for gifting that to me by your generosity and kindness." - Mrs W B

"On behalf of the family I would like to say a huge 'Thank You' for organising Dad's beautiful wheelchair...This has made a huge difference

to Dad's quality of life, and for that we will be eternally grateful to RAFA" - Ms J L

"...knowing Dad's RAFA volunteer is in contact each week is very reassuring to our family. It has enabled us to feel very supported overall." - Son of Mr K

No matter what your role is, how long you have been supporting the Association, or how much time you are able to give, you are making a vital contribution to our collective efforts.

"In the first week of November I took on a welfare case that took me three weeks to sort out with a positive result for the help that was needed...I felt quite proud of myself being able to assist a fellow former RAF serviceman who was in need." - Mrs C F

"Both myself, my wife and two of our volunteers love being out at various locations raising funds for the Association. We find it most enjoyable due to the different people we meet and the stories they tell." - Mr T G

"She was feeling a little down today, but we had a chat and a laugh, and by the end of the call she seemed more like her normal self." - Connections Volunteer

Please accept my sincere thanks for all of your hard work and dedication. I am immensely grateful for the significant contribution that you make to our RAF community.

Air Marshal Sir Baz North KCB OBE

President, Royal Air Forces Association

finding
it tough?
MENTAL WELLBEING
COURSES

struggling

"Are you coping with life's ups & downs?"

We can help.

ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association





MESSAGE FROM THE BRANCH CHAIRMAN & RAFALO.

Our fantastic editor is keeping me honest in writing to you through the excellent Branch newsletter **RAFAGEN**.

I write with a very great sense of pride in all the branch has achieved since March 2020, it seems so long ago that we entered those first difficult lock-down periods, it seems almost surreal to have now held our AGM and for it to have been so well attended and supported, its a real testament to Ken and the rest of Committees' hard work that we all stayed connected, supported and safe. It would be wrong to say it was all plain sailing, clearly life isn't, and we very sadly lost a number of our friends and colleagues to this dreadful virus along the way. We should not forget them or their families as we re-emerge in society some families have paid a very dear price, our collective thoughts and remembrances' will I hope provide some comfort.

So its an optimistic but cautious step forward we take towards Armed Forces Day on 26 June in Letchworth, and our first time out in our local community for a very long period. I hope you can join with us on the stall collecting for the Wings Appeal or recruiting new people to the Branch.

I hope you all have a fabulous Summer, and can enjoy some time away on holidays with loved ones.

Best Wishes Shaun (Chairman)





NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Twenty five members attended our first get-together since 17th March 2020. The event was our **NAAFI BREAK**, held under strict Covid-19 rules at the Par 3 Golf Centre, Letchworth Garden City. We have changed the meeting to the last Wednesday of each month, but the time remains the same, 10.00 hrs 'til noon.

When arrangements were made to re open, we were a little apprehensive on how many would attend, but on the day all worries were forgotten. Not only did we see old faces, there were new ones too. We were pleased to see members of the old Stevenage branch, with whom we have amalgamated recently. Ex Chairman Ernie Brown and Carol Wingoss came all the way from Bagshot, to make sure the branch got off to a good start.

One of the biggest boosts to our reopening was that we had the Branch and Membership Operations Manager (South), Ailsa Gough, join us. During the morning, Ailsa, spoke to all members, and later brought us up to date with what was happening to the Association now after the problems of the Pandemic, and the plans for the future to get back on track. This will take until 2023.



NAAFI BREAK had good reports on our Facebook page from our members as well. A lot of talk about a Victoria Sponge Cake. Something I appear to have missed.

Because of all the problems we have had over the past year, we have decided that NAAFI BREAK will be our only regular social event, at least until we get ourselves back on track. We have chose this morning event, as, from the recent questionnaire sent out, it was preferred to the evening session.

Let us see what the future holds for us, and as we regain our strength, the committee will look at evening sessions and other activities. To do this we need your continued support.



REQUIRE THE SERVICES OF OUR WELFARE OFFICER?

Contact details of the branch Welfare Officer :-

Mark Howell

Tel :-07874015229

email :- markhowell65@gmail.com



“MY” PLANS AS NEW SECRETARY

My late Husband and I joined RAFA initially to support my Dad who was on Committee at the time and had been a member for many, many years: he loved the friendship involved.



Eric with Marie at 2018
Armed Forces Day

I always swore I would never become involved – I didn’t mind what I did to help but I did not want to serve on Committee as I had too many other commitments. “You’ll be there” said my Dad – often. He was just SO proud of me (don’t ask me why) and would have given anything to have me involved in things.

So there I was happily going along with helping out whenever and wherever with no real commitment. Then along came Shaun – not only a steady, trustworthy RAF officer but a truly good friend helping out after my personal sorrows - “I think you would make a good Secretary with all your experience” (!) There is no way could I compare my experience with Ken’s as he would be an extremely hard act to follow.

I eventually agreed to ‘shadow’ Ken to learn a few things – but mainly, I agreed to do so as a tribute to my Dad: he would have absolutely loved the fact that I was now more involved. After a year, I have now risen to the official Committee ranks.

I believe I have conquered Registration on the Portal and I am beginning to receive all sorts of communications. I am proud to serve with a good Committee and will do my best to answer any queries – or at least point you in the right direction.

My only regret is that I never managed to tell my Dad that I was now on Committee!

WILLIAN AIRFIELD

As many of our members will remember, Roy Newbury and I organised an anniversary service at the Memorial in road between Willian and Wymondley. The story that was recently told in this magazine, was researched by Roy and myself, and I thought that we couldn't find any more to add. In order to gather information, we visited libraries, churches, read through newspapers of the time, and spoke to relatives of the Airmen.

The other day my wife and I were taking a stroll through the village of Willian, and stopped to look at the church lynch gate. Whilst my wife read about the gate, I noticed a plaque at the side.



Roy and I knew of the airfield in our story, as it was to this that our two fateful pilots were flying. This was 1912, the plaque states it was operative between 1916 to 1919, some four years before our story.

The Airfields of Great Britain Conservation Trust appear to have placed the plaque in Willian, so let us investigate.

Now let us see what they have to say, and do they agree with what Roy and I researched?.

They say ' The Airfield was known as RAF Willian / RFC Willian / Willian Landing Ground.'

No argument there. Our research knew it as Willian Landing Ground at the time.

They say ' Current Status - Farmland'.

You only have to walk around the Letchworth Green Way to prove that statement.

They say ' Date in use - 1916 to 1919 (notification of relinquishment 13 March); Limited flying September 1912 (exercise)

This agrees with our story. The accident we recorded happened on 6th September 1912, and, as we know was part of a large military exercise. So mystery solved.

For the record (and to fill up the page) let us see what else the Trust said about the Willian Airfield.

Current use - Disused (never seen a plane land there since I moved to the area)...

Used by RAF/RFC

Landing Surface Type - Unpaved (I take it they mean Grass!)

Aircraft Roles - Fighter (It would be interesting to know what fighter planes were around at that time. Can our member from Shuttleworth help?)



Branch Padre

Revd. Cannon Lindsay Dew

Padre's Hour – June 2021

Hello again,

I hope you are well and enjoying the lovely weather. Over the past few years, I've been creating raised beds – this year I've even managed to build a high wooden frame with netting to protect what I attempt to grow from our pesky cat and the birds. Veg has been planted and we will see what becomes of them. I'm not a gardener by any stretch of the imagination but I do enjoy being out in the fresh air and playing at being a gardener.

When I was a baby Vicar I officiated at a Guide's service - I can't remember the occasion (probably a Thinking Day service) but the church was packed. I had written the script of my sermon/address – it was about looking the part by being dressed in the right kit. I wore a pair of trainers under my cassock and on the way in a few Leaders thought that it was a bit under par to be wearing trainers when everyone turned up properly dressed. Anyway, all became clear when I started my address – I talked about looking the part and how people can wear the right kit to show what they hoped would be true. As I talked, I began to take off my clergy robes and when I took my cassock off underneath I was dressed and ready to play tennis. I even took a tennis racket and ball from where I had hidden them in the pulpit. I tried my best to hit the ball against a wall, but it soon became clear that I was just not able to play – my skills were sadly lacking. I spoke about how with practice they might improve but there was no way in which I could call myself a tennis player. I was dressed and looked the part, but I couldn't follow it through by 'being' a tennis player. I spoke about wearing the Guide uniform and looking the part, but you had to be the part too otherwise it was just pretending whether they were in uniform

or not. Being the part takes time and practise, as well as hard work. Wearing a uniform marks us out – and all of us have done that at some point in our lives. Most of us will have worn many uniforms over the years and maybe the most significant in our RAFA context has been wearing RAF blue. Can you remember putting it on for the first time? We looked the part but to become the part we had to endure the square bashing, the classroom teaching about the RAF, the weapons training, basic first aid, all the stuff we had to do to complete the basic training and even then, we'd only just begun. After Passing Out we then embarked on our Trade Training and after completing that being posted to our first Camp. It was a long learning experience to go through and after all of that we had to learn to put our learning into practise – to become what we had chosen to be. For most I guess there was the recognition that becoming what we are takes a life time of learning and then putting that learning into practise.

Sounds a bit life life really.

I look forward to meeting you all again and especially those who are new to the Branch. 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 NAAFI Break. In between these I can be contacted on 07545878082 or email me at lindsaycharlesdew@gmail.com

Kind regards & blessings
Lindsay

Revd Canon Lindsay Dew
Branch Padre



The Royal British Legion
Letchworth Branch



Presents

The Armed Forces Day
Saturday 26th June 2021

10.00am - 16.00pm

Broadway Gardens Letchworth

Fun for the family

Sponsored by Lane & Bennetts of Letchworth



Armed Forces Day

Saturday 26 June 2021, 10am - 4pm

Town Square,
Stevenage



Help raise money for your local charities

Live music: Marching Band (10am) and
Alex Shows UK (12pm, 1:30pm and 3pm)

Plus: Free face painting,
WWII American M8 Tank, and more



Free parking
8am - 6pm
St Georges
Multi storey




armedforcesday.org.uk
#SaluteOurForces

Strict covid-safe measures will be followed

Follow us for more info and to keep up to date:

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www.stevenagetowncentre.com



A friend of the branch showing off his own brand of Gin.

£49.99 a bottle. Profits go towards helping Britain's military community.



<https://www.heroesdrinks.com/item/4/HeroesDrinks/Lord-Trenchard-Gin.html>

REMEMBERING D-DAY

BY A MAN WHO WAS ACTUALLY THERE

THE LATE JOHN STODDARD

BRANCH MEMBER & PADRE



Looking back over the great events of World War II we cannot look at the events of D-Day, without remembering the precarious situation of our nation after Dunkirk. The fleet of little ships rescued the remnants of the B.E.F. and at that time we had less than ten fully equipped Divisions in England whereas the Nazis had thirty Divisions flushed with their victories in Europe, ready and waiting to invade us. The Royal Air Force had only 700 planes opposed to the Luftwaffe's 3000. Goring made a fatal mistake – he switched from bombing the airfields to Blitzing our great cities – London, Coventry, Liverpool, Manchester etc. This gave a breather to the Royal Air Force and with the help of Radar shot down so many bombers that Goering had to admit defeat, and Hitler gave up ideas of invasion at that time and switched his might to attack Russia.

This gave our nation time to work to build up our forces. Churchill gave the country new heart with his stirring speeches. He appointed Lord Beaverbrook – owner of Daily Express Newspapers – as Minister for Aircraft Production, and his target was one hundred new planes per week. He more than exceeded this target. The two protagonists in the Battle of Britain were Air Marshall Dowding, head of Fighter Command and Field Marshall Goering. Lord Dowding died in 1970 at the age of 87 and Goering took poison in prison in 1946. Make no mistake had we lost the Battle of Britain there would not have been a D-Day in 1944 – by then we would have been part of Hitler's Third Reich – destined to rule Europe for one thousand years, so said Hitler!

The invasion was many months in planning. It was given the code name OVERLORD. General Eisenhower was appointed Commander in Chief and set up his S.H.A.E.F. Head quarters in Southwick House, Portsmouth. What isn't generally known is that a Naval Commander and his work team were appointed to convert a house into the Head Quarters with the huge maps of the Normandy Beaches, great plotting tables etc., and when they had completed their task they were placed under house arrest and not released until D-Day was launched. So great was the actual D-Day secrecy.

Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin the year before at the Tehran Conference had decided that the invasion would be June 1944 determined by the weather conditions. The code name for the great fleet would be Operation NEPTUNE.

As we know owing to bad weather, the story goes that when Eisenhower had to make the big decision, he turned to Monty and said "Shall we go?" and Monty without hesitation replied; "Yes – Let's go for it". So one could say Monty helped make the

decision. A couple of days later Eisenhower remarked “Thank God we went when we did”. The weather had worsened and further delay would have been chaotic.

The forces assembled in the New Forest area – that is the combined Ops and Commandoes who were to be the first waves to land. Monty visited the troops and in a speech said “We have a long sea journey ahead of us and at the end of it we will have to land on an enemy coast in the face of determined opposition. The violence, speed and power of our initial assault must carry everything before it”.

Finally, June 6th 1944 the great fleet sailed. Imagine 6000 ships of all sizes packed to capacity with, tanks, guns etc supported by 300 warships detailed to attack the gun batteries in the pill boxes etc. Spitfires flew from England to act as spotters radioing information to warships re range etc. It was truly a combined operation. The Royal Air Force and the American Air Force flew 14,000 sorties during the longest day.

Just after midnight in the first hour of June 6th, 29,000 airborne paras were landed in 867 towed gliders to secure strategic points including Pegasus Bridge and others.

59,000 United States troops were landed on Omaha and Utah beaches and faced strong opposition from a tough German Division who happened to be on exercise in the Bayeux area. Casualties were high – 4,000 killed on the first day.

75,000 British troops were landed on Gold and Juno Beaches including Canadians and Free French on Juno Beach. Again they faced tough resistance in the first hours – 3,000 killed on Gold Beach alone. That first day also 900 tanks and 600 artillery guns were landed. A truly magnificent logistic achievement, considering the rough weather and the opposition.

Overall 19,000 were killed on D-Day.

There were however major factors in our favour. The slow reaction of the Nazi High Command to comprehend that the invasion had started, and the fact that Hitler alone could give the command to move more units into Normandy. Hitler was asleep and had left strict instructions that he was not to be disturbed. Also they could not believe that we would have been foolish enough to invade in such rough weather. Also they still thought that Calais would be the place where the docks could be used. No one dreamt of a Mulberry Harbour. It was still our top secret. Also there was doubt in the Nazi mind, because of the D-Day deception plan code named Operation FORTITUDE, where fictitious armies were being assembled in Kent – pointing to Calais and in Scotland aimed at Norway. The other factor in our favour was Air Supremacy

On D-Day the Royal Air Force and the United States Air Force flew 14,000 sorties. The Hawker Typhoon with 60 pounder rockets proved far superior to the German Stuka

dive-bombers. The U.S. Thunderbolts carried devastating 5" anti-tank rockets. They hit anything that moved, wrecking whole column of Panther Tanks. All were supported by Mustangs, Hurricanes, and Spitfires. A truly devastating air power – and such a far cry from the Battle of Britain days when the 'Few' struggled to defeat the many of the Luftwaffe.

Also in our favour was the superb organisation of our High Command S.H.A.E.F. whereas the Nazi command were handicapped with bad organisation coupled with Hitler's demand to give the orders alone thus restricting the military and the professional soldiers who he constantly overruled.

In the following week after D-Day the Germans lost 97,000 men; 28 Generals; 354 Lieutenant Generals – and to cap it all Rommell who was in charge Normandy defence was wounded.

Churchill landed on D-plus 2 having refused the King permission to join him in view of the danger, saying "You, your majesty are far more important than I".

Everything was put into the invasion forces and D-Day just had to succeed. It did however leave England very vulnerable with only 6,373 officers and 109,251 other ranks left to defend our islands.

The amazing organisation behind such a great military force can be appreciated when one considers the feeding of the thousands of troops – logistics are mind boggling – for example one weeks food delivery to the troops in Normandy included 446 tons of potatoes and 98 tons of meat!

I know you would like to know the part I played in helping Eisenhower make D-Day the success it was!!!!.

In the early days of the war, I was a reporter on THE CITIZEN, remember THE CITIZEN? Claimed to be the only local newspaper to be published and printed in Letchworth. At that time everyone had to do an extra voluntary job to help the war effort, so I joined the Auxiliary Fire Service on the grounds that if there was a fire or bomb damage etc. I would be on the spot to report the event. They gave me a BSA motorbike and I was designated a Messenger and Despatch Rider. There were no such luxuries as mobile phones. Messages had to be conveyed on the assumption that the lines were down or jammed. In 1940 I well remember during the London Blitz I was stationed at the end of Broadway and could see the great glow in the sky during the bombing. Letchworth AFS was in reserve and could have been called in to support the London Fire Service if necessary.

I knew my reserved occupation time would soon be up, so I joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve to be sure to get into the Royal Air Force rather than any other service. I was keen to be a pilot, but when I was finally called up I failed the medical. I was sick in the Link Trainer – that is the test cockpit which assimilated flying motion. I was then transferred to Special Duties, and was posted to R.A.F. Valley in Anglesey. Here I was trained as a Deputy Controller in the Fighter Command Operations Room. Our job was to control the fighter aircraft and the air sea rescue planes etc.

There were twenty WAAFs' on my watch of which I was in charge. These were Radio Operators and Plotters. We worked shift hours and one day after our tour of duty – we finished at midnight – and there was a heat wave at the time. It was June 30th and had been stifling in the Ops Room which was underground. The WAAFs' invited me into the kitchen area as they had found out that it was my 21st birthday, and they had a present for me. On the table was a large cardboard box, I opened it – wrapper after wrapper until I got to the bottom, and there was a small parcel. Opening the parcel I found what turned out to be a super present, a small tin of Nescafe Coffee, a rare treat in war time rationing. We all had a cup of coffee and then they asked me if they could take blankets up on to the ground above the Ops Room, and in view of the heat and sleep there in the cool. I had to agree. Then they asked me to join them, to which I also agreed. So I can honestly say that I remember my 21st birthday very clearly, receiving a tin of coffee and sleeping with twenty WAAFs'

The peak of the Bombing was slowing down and one day a notice came round stating that there were vacancies in COMBINED OPERATIONS preparing for the invasion. The vacancies were on offer to volunteers from the Special Duties personnel in the intelligence section. I immediately decided this was the job for me. There was however one snag – applications had to have a second language. I had only taken schoolboy German for a brief period and had forgotten most of it – but I thought “Ah! Well here goes.” And I put down German as my second language, hoping against hope that the interview panel wouldn't ask to demonstrate have fluent I was. Fortunately they didn't and much to my surprise I was accepted for training.

After signing the Official Secrets Act I was sent on a course at Baliol College Oxford, and then for three weeks at Worcester College to train in codes and ciphers, which was to be my new job.

There was about thirty of us on the course and we were all promoted on completion, with a special passing out ceremony to the tune of Moonlight and Roses, which was the favourite music of the Commanding Officer's wife. I was then assigned to the Second Tactical Air Force, and I joined a small unit of a jeep and two caravans. Our H.Q. was split up into several small groups in case we didn't all make the beaches. Our main task was to establish as quickly as possible landing strips

near Bayeaux so that the Spitfires etc. could land and refuel to give them more time in the air over the battle area.

During my time in training we had to do some commando training, which nearly killed me, and then go under canvas in the New Forest to wait for the word to go to the dock for the great day.

One day we had an invitation to go to a party at Beaulie Abbey. I went with two WRENS who had been in Naval Intelligence with our combined ops unit, and as we walked into the great hall, with it's huge log fire burning, I saw a young Naval Lieutenant with his back to the fire enjoying a pint. It was Bim Imber. He was the only Letchworth person I met during my time in the Royal Air Force. Bim was part of the combined ops training and he later to become Captain of a Navel vessel which helped tow the Mullberry Harbour blocks to Normandy.

I have been surprised on how much detail some D Day veterans remember of the big day. I am afraid I only have certain things imprinted in my mind which I will never forget.

When the call came for our small convoy to move to the docks to embark on the landing craft our Chaplain held a short service. He said the sea would be rough, but we would be in the safe hands of the Royal Navy. He went on to say that when we got to the other side we had no idea of what to expect, but to take heart we would all be in the hands of Almighty God. We then sang a hymn, I call it the Navy hymn. Looking around at the mass of vessels of all kinds and the sea which seemed full of ships, it was a most appropriate hymn –“Eternal Father Strong To Save”. I chose that hymn sixty years later when we held a D-Day commemoration service at the War Memorial in Letchworth Garden City,, on a hot sunny day in June 2004 – quite different elements to 6th June 1944. We were on board an LCT – one of the Kayser built U.S. ships. I have a vivid memory looking back at the ship from the front where our vehicles were sandwiched between two huge Sherman tanks, that ship was bending in the middle with each roll of the sea. I never thought that we would make it. We also had on board a Scottish Commando Regiment and they played their Bagpipes as we neared the beach.

Our first realisation that we were entering the danger zone was when there was a sudden explosion in the LCT behind us. It had evidently hit a mine and it was horrific when it completely disappeared in a matter of minutes. As we forged ahead all we could see was debris and bodies. A scene I will never forget.

Another memory I have is seeing the Barrage Balloons attached to some vessels swinging from one side to the other in the high wind. Each time the balloon would splash into the sea and rise to swing over the other side for another splash. We saw no Luftwaffe planes, only Spitfires overhead

We were seventeen hours on our LCT, and I was sea sick most of the time. Fortunately the beach had been cleared by the first wave of commandos and already they were laying the roll mats for our vehicles to drive across the sand.

Once off the beach we followed tanks with flails, heavy chains rotating in front which exploded landmines that may have been in our path. It was minutes after landing that we passed the first scenes of war and devastation. As we drove quickly off the beach up one of the tracks which remains today, we saw two German tanks smouldering with black smoke, and by the side a charred body of a German soldier, and another hanging out of the turret. On an unburnt arm was he was still wearing his wrist watch. Memories that remain clear are one that you want to forget.

Across another field, flame throwers were at work attacking a Pill Box on high ground. I was surprised that the flame thrower tanks towed a trailer full of fuel. A venerable target if there ever was one.

Some of the great warships with guns blazing were also firing rocket launchers. They made a constant screaming noise, with clouds of smoke behind. A frightening sound, but a lot more frightening for the recipients.

As we approached the road junction we were stopped by an officer who noted our markings and asked the Intelligence unit to search a command bunker located in some trees. I went in with another Sergeant, and we went through some filing cabinets, desks etc., looking for codes which could be useful. On a table was an unfinished breakfast with coffee still in the mugs. They must have made a hasty retreat. I took away some correspondence, some of which I have kept to this day, but no codes were found – only burnt papers.

We moved on, but took the wrong turning and ended up in a quiet village. As we approached the main street we heard ‘plops’ around us, some of them hitting the vehicles, then belated cracks of guns. A soldier appeared from a hedgerow shouting at us that the Germans were still in occupation, and were shooting at us from the church bell tower. The village was Le Villers Le Sac. Needless to say we beat a hasty retreat pulling off the road into a field by trees for camouflage. We had to find our location. We could not get to Bayeux, so we decided to wait until we received orders to proceed after the Germans had been evicted. That first night we took in turns to man the radio and I was getting into my sleeping bag intending to sleep under the vehicle when two German soldiers appeared. They were carrying rifles and walking towards me. My weapon was in the jeep. I just stood there and was greatly relieved when they nervously approached me handing out their guns in an act of surrender. They were more frightened than I was. I was in the Royal Air Force and not exactly trained in receiving prisoners’ of war. We put them in the Jeep and took them down the road where tanks were moving, and handed them over the Army.

My memory fails as to the day and time we were heavily shelled , but I knew the shells were coming closer to us. My next memory was coming round after being sedated in a hospital tent. I looked up at the large Red Cross painted on the roof of the tent. Then I realised I was a casualty. Looking round I saw a soldier who had lost a leg and another who had been blinded. I felt myself to see if I was all there. What a relief to find I was in one piece, but heavily bandaged from waist to neck and in some pain. I learnt that the blast had thrown me some distance and there was shrapnel wounds and a collapsed lung. The lung was a write-off, but I have done fairly well in life. I am 89 years old and have played tennis and golf etc., all on one lung.

I was flown out on a converted DC3 to Swindon for immediate treatment and then by ambulance through towns and villages to a R.A.F. hospital in Church Village, South Wales, When the ambulance stopped in a town or village on way to Wales the drivers used to open the rear doors for fresh air, and the people were used to seeing chaps in ambulances en route from Normandy to a British hospital, and they literally showered us with sweets and cigarettes. Most embarrassing knowing the shortage of such items. I was kept in hospital for treatment and recovery for six months. I was in bed for four months and had to learn to walk again, weighing only six stone. I was eventually sent to Blackpool for three weeks recovery.

I was finally demobbed and awarded 100% pension, but had to go for regular checkups in Cambridge. Finally they offered me a lump sum. Well it did pay for a 1936 Morris 8 for me.



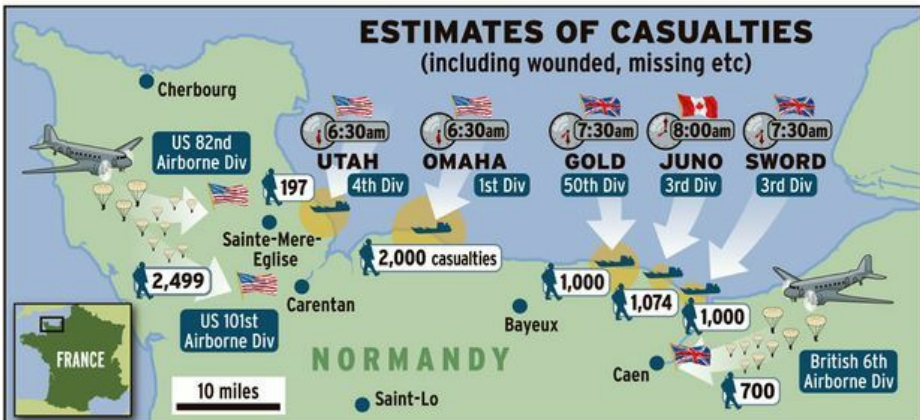
Late John Standard MB

To conclude, a story comes from Normandy that some days after the break out from the beaches when a German General was surrendering to General Montgomery. They faced each other in Monty's caravan. Spread before them was a map of the area and the Nazi General was saying "I will surrender this hill top here, this village here, and this river bank here.....", but Monty stopped him and said "Sir, I demand everything, totalitarian surrender, nothing less". I believe that all engaged in Operation Overlord had that same resolve, to see the final defeat of the 3rd Reich and Nazi tyranny, there was not thought of failure, only complete surrender of Hitler's Germany.

What does the letter 'D' stand for in 'D-Day'?

Many explanations have been given for the meaning of D-Day, June 6, 1944, the day the Allies invaded Normandy from England during World War II. The Army has said that it is "simply an alliteration, as in H-Hour." Others say the first D in the word also stands for "day," the term a code designation. The French maintain the D means "disembarkation," still others say "debarkation," and the more poetic insist D-Day is short for "day of decision." When someone wrote to General Eisenhower in 1964 asking for an explanation, his executive assistant Brigadier General Robert Schultz answered: "General Eisenhower asked me to respond to your letter. Be advised that any amphibious operation has a 'departed date'; therefore the shortened term 'D-Day' is used."

Answer taken from :- The National WWII Museum, 945 Magazine Street, New Orleans, LA 70130. foundational

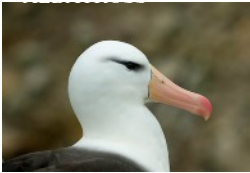


I heard the other day the the bird on the shoulder of the uniform of ‘other ranks’ was an Albatross, when I was always led to believe it was an Eagle.

Time to investigate.

Answer Number One: -There has been occasional controversy over whether the badge that the Royal Air Force non commissioned ranks wear on each shoulder is an eagle or an albatross. To quell the debate, the Air Ministry issued an order in 1949 declaring that the bird was in fact an eagle.

However, whilst living at the Gables in the late 1970’s, Mr Pepper told a local newspaper journalist Ivor Wynne Jones; “That he rejected the eagle because it was the badge of the Germans, who were then our enemies.” Mr Pepper chose instead the albatross as the basis for the insignia after a visit to the British Museum, where taxidermists had mounted an albatross soaring majestically”.



Answer Number Two :- “As the bird emblem in question was a carry over from the RNAS when the RAF was established in 1918 you would imagine it was an albatross. However the wearing of the bird emblem was first authorised in Admiralty Weekly Order No. 2 of 23 June 1914 as a means of distinguishing naval airmen from seamen when they changed to class III uniform. It states, “the emblem is also incorporated into the trade badges for ratings in the RNAS which are worn on the right sleeve with the eagle facing the front. So, the Navy called it an eagle when first authorised in 1914.

The following image Eagle, Albatross (or whatever) and the official RAF Badge (On the gates of the RAFC Cranwell) was approved by the college of Arms in 1923 who stated it depicted an Eagle. Certainly looks more like an Eagle than an Albatross.”

I'll leave you to sort it out. – Editor

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The RAFAGEN is produced every quarter and sent to all members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District branch of the Royal Air Forces Association.

If you would like to tell your story in RAFAGEN or have any comments about the magazine, the branch or the Association, we would like to hear from you. It can either be by hard copy through the mail, (any photographs will be returned immediately) to Ken Needham 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3HJ, or via email to kwn056@btinternet.com The next issue will be published at the end of September.

NAAFI BREAKS for the next few months are as follows :-

Wednesday 30th June 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Wednesday 28th July 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Wednesday 25th August 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Wednesday 29th September 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Wednesday 27th October 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Wednesday 24th November 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Details of the December 2021 meeting will be announced in latter issues

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