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AIR FORCES
Association**

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RAFA

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH (including Stevenage)



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Branch formed 15th October 1946

Association Registered Charity: 226686 (England & Wales) SC037673 (Scotland)

Branch Registered Charity No. 1071536 Branch

RAFAGEN

The official newsletter and magazine of the
ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION
LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2023/4

Now including Stevenage



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Vice Chairman:- Rev, Lindsay Dew

Secretary:- Marie Mahoney

(Contact:- mam90@hotmail.co.uk)

Treasurer:- Ken Needham

Wings Appeal Officer:-Eric Dagless

Branch Welfare Officer: Vacant

For Welfare Contact:-Branch Secretary

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Branch Padre:- Rev. Canon Lindsay Dew

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John Airey: John Tunesi: Elliot Needham

Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. Flt. Lt. Liam Obiston

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THE DUTIES OF YOUR 2024/5 COMMITTEE

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IT OFFICER

ELLIOT NEEDHAM



YOUR 2024/5 BRANCH COMMITTEE (CONTINUED)

CONFERENCE DELEGATE

JOHN AIREY



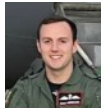
RAFAGEN NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE EDITOR

KEN NEEDHAM



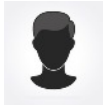
ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION LIAISON OFFICER

Flt Lt LIAM OSBINSTON



STANDARD BEARER

VACANT



Message from the Chairman Jim Box :-

Looking forward to another year of NAAFI breaks and continuing friendship. We had a very successful Wings Appeal last year and hopefully this year will even better. A full list of meetings and activities will be issued shortly by Ken and will include the usual Wings Appeal Collections and participation in Armed Forces Day in Letchworth. A Branch visit has now been arranged to the Shuttleworth Collection in May, and full details will be given for all events at NAAFI Breaks.

NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



I have heard that our previous RAFALO, Shaun Griffin has received his "VETERANS IDENTITY CARD". Veterans are getting younger



The Annual General Meeting over, and a new committee elected. From what I hear is that committee are taking the branch into bigger opportunities. The Chairman is arranging visits to local places of interest for you, which I trust you will participate. Our Wings Appeal Officer is adding new collecting points for the branch 2024 Wings Appeal, and I hear R.A.F. Henlow may be getting more involved with our branch with events



June 6th of this year will be 80 years since the D-Day landings.

Many of our older members will remember our ex branch padre, John Stoddard who was a member

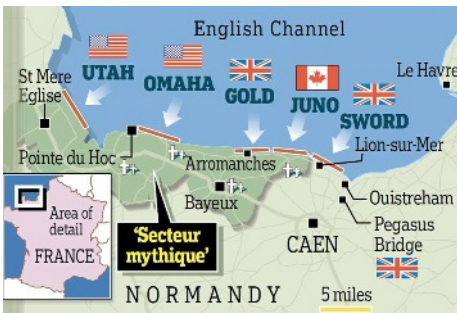


of the Royal Air Force who went over on the landing craft on that momentous day.

John first gave a talk on his experiences on the topic of D-Day first to the local Rotary members and then to our branch. After his talk to us he passed on a copy of his script to me for publication in RAFAGEN. I have since lost my copy of the script but it was later reproduced in John's book of his memories.

His talk told us what it was really like to be there, which was very moving, but he also told us of amusing antidotes of what was terrifying time.

Something, until John explained it, I always thought odd, how come a member of the R.A.F was amongst the soldiers on the landing craft. Perhaps you would like to let us know your explanation.



Remembering John and D-Day made me re-read his book again, and I found a memory he recalls *“As a member of the Letchworth, Hitchin and District branch of the Royal Air Forces Association I have felt very privileged to conduct the service at the Letchworth War Memorial every Battle of Britain Sunday, in*

remembrance of those who gave all”. This event ended with John having to retire from being our padre due to age and health. Roy Newbury and I continued remembering the B of B few by raising the R.A.F. Ensign in Baldock, Letchworth and Hitchin which flew during the month of September. This event has now been disbanded.

Talking about John reminds me of a story he often told. The story goes on how he slept with twenty WAAF's on his 21st birthday. A thing he was very proud of.

I may even relate it to you in the future.

JANUARY NAAFI BREAK

January in the past has been a quiet month for NAAFI BREAK with numbers being low, but this year the Dimples Cafe at the Letchworth Par 3 Golf Centre was as crowded as it usually is for our monthly event.

The numbers were increased when we had a surprise visit from four members from R.A.F. Henlow.

Steve King one of the guests is leaving his post as Station Warrant Officer of Henlow, to take up another post at a different station. Steve has done a lot for this branch in bringing us back into folds of R.A.F. Henlow. We seem to have lost contact with the camp since we heard of its closure. The closure is still on, but until the time comes when the gates finally close, we, and other branches in the area, will have the pleasure of being associated with R.A.F. Henlow.

Thank you Steve for the part you have played in helping our branch, and we wish you all the best in your new post.

Our guests spent their time coming around the tables talking to members, and answering questions on service life today compared to “our day”.

Later in this issue is a story by one of our members, here are a few notes from the author.

Note from the author, Bernard Drummond.

Out of the blue is a true story that took place and the pilot was in 4 squadron when I was serving as a Rigger at R.A.F. Wunstorf in Germany 1950/51. I hasten to say I did not service that Vampire.

Bernard

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Attendees: Ewan Kennedy, Ted Martin, John Tunesi, Ron Lowe, Eric Dagless, Marie Mahoney, Bernard Drummond, Roza Drummond, Ernie Brown, Carole Wilgoss, Pauline Collinson, John Airey, Kathy Airey, Jim Box, Brenda Box, Lindsay Dew, Derick Larkin, Frank Turner, Ken Needham, Lynda Needham.

Apologies: John Burnapp, John Agnew, Malcolm & Linda Menzies, Lesley Starr, Elliot Needham

Jim Box (current Chairman) welcomed all present and gave a brief resume of events during the past 12 months. He wished to thank Ken, Marie and all members of the Committee for their hard work over the past year.

Minutes of the last AGM (22nd February 2023) had been circulated to Committee, they were Proposed by Ken Needham and Seconded by Eric Dagless. There were no matters arising.

The Financial Statement had been tabled and was agreed: Proposed Marie Mahoney, Seconded John Airey.

The Vice Chairman took over the Chair at this point to elect a new Chairman

Chairman	Jim Box
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The following Committee members were voted in with no objections:

Vice Chairman	Lindsay Dew
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Secretary	Marie Mahoney
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Treasurer	Ken Needham
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Wings Appeal Officer	Eric Dagless
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General Committee	John Airey, John Tunesi, Elliot Needham
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(Other positions to be allocated at next Committee meeting)

Eric Dagless: Events already booked for this year: 1st/2nd June at Standalone Farm, 22nd June at Armed Forces Day. 6th April at Sainsbury's, Letchworth and Hitchin in September (date TBA).

Lindsay Dew advised that he was making enquiries at the Methodist Church for the Battle of Britain Church service and will confirm the date later.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 10.20 a.m. but continued with the NAAFI Break .

A.G.M. & NAAFI BREAK GALLERY FEBRUARY 2024



In addition to two RAF personnel from Henlow, we had a welcome return visit to NAAFI BREAK of member Derick Larkins, (insert) and a new member to the Association, Ted Martin (right above)



RAFA HOLIDAYS



With Spring on its way, many people may be starting to think about booking their holidays.

The Association has a selection of holiday homes located in the picturesque coastal towns of Selsey in West Sussex, Dunbar in Scotland and Hemsby in Norfolk, which are available to RAF veterans, Association members and serving personnel to book for short stays .

The holiday homes and chalets offer well-kept, self-catering accommodation at affordable prices and are located near local amenities, including leisure facilities .

For more information about each holiday break location, please follow the link below, or contact wingsholidays@rafa.org.uk.

Powerful Assets for Force Protection

An article published by the Royal Air Forces Association

The bond between humans and dogs has a deep-rooted history, dating back thousands of years. Today, the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) uses this bond to its operational advantage its Military Working Dogs. Initially formed in 1942 as the Ministry of Aircraft Production Guard Dog School, the RAF's dog teams have evolved over time to protect high-value military locations, assets, and personnel. With approximately 180 dogs and 135 handlers, each dog team contributes the equivalent of eight to 15 personnel.

The Military Working Dogs' work can be categorised into two types: detection and protection. These highly versatile canines are trained not only for detecting explosives, arms, vehicles, and drugs but also for providing protection and assistance to their handlers. They can locate missing individuals, including those with mental health issues, and alert their handlers to the presence of intruders. The dogs' exceptional senses allow them to search large open areas, woodlands, and buildings efficiently.

Training plays a crucial role in developing these skilled canines. The Ministry of Defence conducts phase one training at the Defence Animal Training Centre, followed by specialised training lasting between 12 weeks to six months. The handlers also undergo intensive training to ensure the success of their partnerships with the dogs. Regular testing and participation in Military Working Dog trials maintain the teams' high standards.

R.A.F. dog teams are not limited to serving within the UK. They are prepared to work overseas, adapting to different environments and scenarios. The R.A.F. acquires dogs from the Netherlands, primarily utilising shepherd breeds such as German Shepherds, Belgian Shepherds, Dutch Shepherds, and Malinois for tracking, pursuing, and protecting. For detection purposes, gundogs like Springer Spaniels, Cocker Spaniels, German Short-Haired Pointers, and Labradors are employed.

Throughout their service, the dogs live in R.A.F. kennels and receive meticulous care from Kennel Assistants. When their careers come to an end, efforts are made to retire them to suitable homes where they can live out their days comfortably. Ex-R.A.F. canines retire with their handlers whenever possible, but those needing re-adjustment training are exposed to civilian environments to ensure a smooth transition.

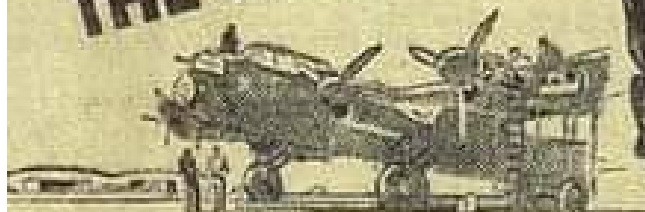
The R.A.F.'s commitment to its Military Working Dogs extends beyond their active service. The annual UK Military Working Dog Trials provide a platform for R.A.F. Police and their dogs to demonstrate their capabilities and compete for recognition. The trials include various operational scenarios, emphasising agility, obedience, and tracking skills. These competitions foster teamwork and inspire the next generation of R.A.F. handlers.

The R.A.F.'s Military Working Dogs serve as invaluable assets, supporting the protection and enablement of Air and Space Power. With their extraordinary sensory abilities, they exemplify the bond between handlers and their dog companions while upholding the R.A.F.'s core values.



R.A.F. Police dog from the 1950's - 3952 Air Dog Hausa

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Ex-R.A.F. Tradesmen. You did a grand war-time job. Now the peace-time R.A.F. offers you —

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- new pay rates starting on 1st July.
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100,000 men are wanted. The need is vital. Here is an opportunity to make the most of your experience. Enjoy once more the comradeship of the finest Service in the world.

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RAF

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*joining/rejoining
the R.A.F. Please send
details without obligation.

*Strike out word which does not apply.

Post to Air Ministry, S.A. Victory House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2.

NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION

Future updates to the Royal Air Forces Association crest

We have been working with R.A.F. Ceremonial to update the R.A.F. Association crest with the Tudor Crown, in line with His Majesty The King's new cypher. The crown will replace the St Edward's Crown, used in Queen Elizabeth II's cypher.

The updated crest will be released for use once we have been informed who will become our new Royal Patron. The Palace is currently undertaking a review of all Queen Elizabeth's patronages.

In line with the R.A.F.'s approach, we will adopt a staged approach to replacing existing items which feature our current crest. This prudent approach is important to minimise wastage of our charity materials and resources. Existing items that features the current crest will continue to be used until they need to be replaced.

Oranches who are currently considering making a significant purchase featuring the Association crest, such as a Branch Standard, are requested to consider whether the purchase could be delayed until the new crest is released for use.

Please share your D-Day memories with us

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, and we are looking for RAF veterans to share their stories of this momentous turning point in the Second World War.

If you know of any local members with a close connection to D-Day who would like to share their memories with us, please let us know by sending us a few short paragraphs explaining their story to *Caroline Jacobi* at Head Office

OUT OF THE BLUE

BY

BERNARD DRUMMOND

Flight Lieutenant Wicks looked up at the bluest of skies, he was cradling a cup of tea as he leaned against the open door of the Officer's mess. 'Dipper', as he was known on the squadron, happily contemplated the day to come. There was to be a little exercise in which he and another pilot were going to try to locate a NATO army convoy, which was part of the continuous manoeuvres that were taking place at the time. The year was 1950, and the squadron was based in West Germany. The 'Cold War' was the reason for the military activity, but to the pilots of 4 squadron, whilst the weather remained like today service in Germany was all still rather enjoyable.

Dipper stood there smiling to himself as he recalled the previous weekend's party that had been held for his friend Roger. They had all acted like a bunch of rowdy schoolboys pulling each up and down the food lift before finally stranding Roger half-way up and leaving him there for a while.

He had to admit feeling rather pleased with life, for, as a schoolboy he had hero-worshipped the Battle of Britain fighter pilots, and it had always been his ambition to be one of these brave fliers, Now here he was , an Officer in the Royal Air Force, doing the thing he most enjoyed. The love of his life, however, was Pauline .They were engaged to be married and his fiancée was shortly about to join him in Germany, life was good.

The metrological briefing that morning had been the usual lecture from the met officer who was widely regarded as a total incompetent, hardly ever right, and sometimes seriously wrong in his forecast. It was occasion of much hilarity, and he was kept supplied with fir cones and seaweed, and on his last birthday Dipper and his fellow officers had presented the hapless 'met man ' with

one of those little houses that had a man or woman coming out if the weather was wet or dry.



In spite of the light hearted banter in the Officer's mess there was of course the serious business of flying. As Dipper and his colleagues walked towards the squadron hangers they could hear the jet engines of the Vampires warming up as the ground crew completed all the pre-flight checks that were necessary. The squadron had had a few mishaps since being equipped with these twin boomed aircraft, so the emphasis on

safety was rigorously carried out under the eagle eye of the senior flight sergeant, or 'Chiefy' as he was known. There has recently been a sad incident involving 'rookie' pilots of another squadron that had resulted in their deaths during take off, so there was no room for complacency by ground crew or their pilots.

The operation that day seemed pretty much run of the mill'. Dipper and his friend, Roger, were to fly off and locate the army convoy, and on their return would brief the rest of the squadron for an attack. To paraphrase a well known saying however, 'the best laid plans of men and mickeys often come unstuck'. In this case they had detected a problem with Dippers aircraft that needed a least a day's maintenance. He was detailed to a new jet that had been delivered from the UK. By the time that was all sorted out, it was decided that Roger would take off alone and 'Dipper would follow as soon as possible. Eventually he took off to follow his friend, but was unable to rendezvous with him, because of the close proximity to the East German border they were instructed not to make contact with each other, so Dipper decided to carry out the search on his own. He reasoned that the Army trucks would be parked under trees, so that he would have to fly low to be able to see them. Crossing some fields at a height of about 20 feet his aircraft suddenly lost power, pulling the stick back to get more height he got to about 300 feet.

At this time the R.A.F. Were not equipped with Ejector Seats, and the minimum height for a bale out was about 400 feet.



Dipper had no choice, he prepared for a crash landing, but at that height and speed his options were limited and he just had to hope for a reasonably flat uninhabited area in which to set the aircraft down. He made a 'May Day' call just before the plane hit the ground, and crashed just short of the bank of the river

Weser. The impact caused the collapse of the seat, and 'Dipper' made a sickening contact with the gun sight. At this point it would be true to say that Dipper had lost consciousness, and was only much later able to piece together the details of the accident. Amazingly it appeared that the wrecked Vampire had skated across the Weser like a flat stone, coming to rest just over the far bank of the river, shredding debris along the way. Dipper in latter life would say that God must have been watching over him. First of all there was no fire, and secondly there was a Guardian Angel in the form of a German shepherd who with another farm worker cut the restraining harness, and pulled the unconscious pilot from the wreckage, wrapped him in his own parachute, and tended him with skill and care until an ambulance arrived to take the seriously injured man to Hanover military hospital. Investigators of the accident were later able to tell Dipper that the German who had helped to save his life was a former member of The Luftwaffe medical corps.

Dipper remained unconscious for several days, and was amnesiac for weeks afterwards. His friends from the squadron delighted in telling him what a difficult patient he had been, and some asked him when was he going to get up off his backside and come back to work?. With serious head trauma he spent several more weeks in close care before being allowed out of hospital to take a spell of convalescence. Unfortunately for Dipper, his operational flying days were over, but he still had the love of Pauline, and virtually his last act before leaving Germany was to marry her in the still war-scarred Cathedral of Hamburg. Life was still good.



COMMITTEE NEWS

March 2024

Although it was a new committee, the faces weren't new, but their official positions were, as can be seen on the inside cover.

The usual items out of the way it was down to more important business.

One of the most important items was the fact that we now have the use of a Gazebo for our events. It will not belong to the branch, but the owners have given us first choice when it needs to be used by us. The problem that was raised at the meeting was that of insurance as this is not a standard RAFA gazebo. Further investigations are to be made and is to be taken up at the next meeting or before it is used before then.

Lindsay was able to confirm that this years Battle of Britain service is to be held on Sunday 29th September and this year will be held at the Letchworth Methodist Church on the corner of Pixmore Way and Norton Way South.

A trip to the Shuttleworth Aircraft Museum is being organised for May. Exact dates will be announced later, and we will keep you informed. We have been before and it is a very interesting visit. We do have the services of a guide.

No more business so the Chairman called time until May.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association

Mr Bailey Heath of Stevenage

**WE NEED MORE NEW
MEMBERS**



The Last Post

A chance to pause for a moment in quiet contemplation for our friends and colleagues who have passed away

We have learnt of the death of David Yorke, a past Secretary of the Stevenage branch. The news was given to us by his sister, who included a donation for the branch.



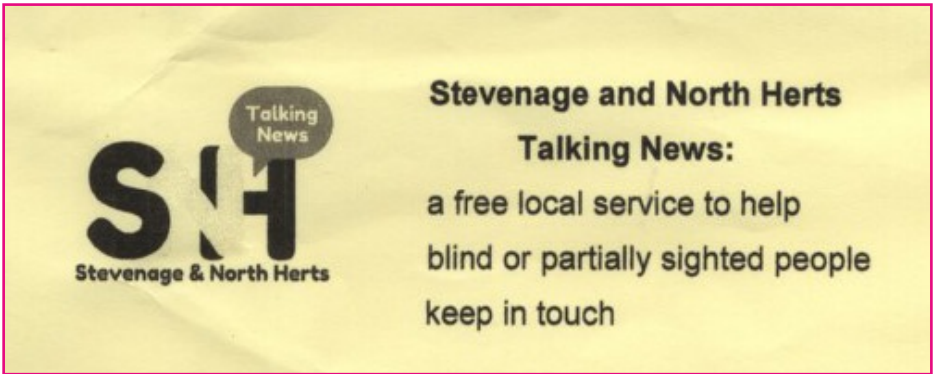
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Registered charity number 1184417

The RAFAGEN is produced every quarter and sent to 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

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

27th March 2024

24th April 2024

29th May 2024

26th June 2024

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