

COMET Cycle 2018



The Comet Cycle event took place in early June of this year, organised by Wg Cdr Charles Howard-Vyse and Wg Cdr Emma Thompson it comprised of an intrepid team of 15-20 enthusiastic cyclists and a dedicated support team. Coinciding with the RAF 100 celebrations, the event followed part of the route used by the heroic 'Comet Line', an underground organisation that escorted downed Allied aircrews to safety from behind enemy lines.

Starting from NATO HQ in Evere, the team cycled the Comet Line until they reached the town of Lille where they spent the night. By Sunday afternoon they had reached a significant point of interest along their route, the town of St Omer (France) where the roots of the RAF were firmly founded (RFC units had been established at the aerodrome between Aug - Sep 1914). The group of cyclists stopped at the memorial to the Secret Army at Marcq-Labliau where appears the name of the Allied airman Gerald E Sorensen who, after jumping from his flaming plane landed in Gibecq on May 1st 1944. Sorensen was assisted by the Comet Line, but was tragically killed fighting alongside the resistance against the occupation.

After a brief stop and a picnic at Beloeil, the team pedaled onwards to Rumes. There they were treated to an encounter with Mdm Herriette Hanotte (also fondly known as Monique), a National Heroine and member of the Hanotte family, who at the age of 16 personally escorted airman across the border; evading German patrols and onward to safety. The encounter took place outside the former Hanotte family home, where there is a plaque dedicated to the bravery of the family and their generosity.

Article Written by Sgt Richard Jacobs