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BELGIAN BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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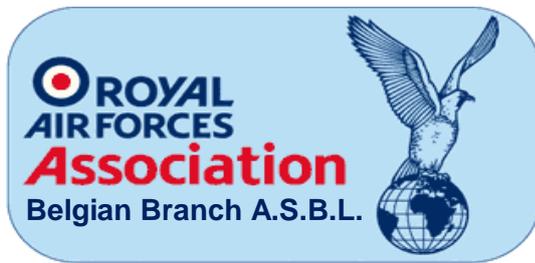
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NEWSLETTER NO 103

JUL – AUG – SEP 2011

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THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION
Maison des Ailes – Rue Montoyer 1-B 33-1040 Brussels.
 Branch No: 0645
Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
Hon Patron: H.E. Jonathan Brenton British Ambassador
Branch Honorary Co-Presidents:
 Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper KBE MA FCMI RAF
 Sqn Ldr (Ret'd) E Hearn DFC*
Branch Hon Vice-President: Air Cdre S Dobb CBE MA RAF

BELGIAN BRANCH COMMITTEE – JUL TO SEP 2011

CHAIRMAN	Robert (Dick) Whittingham (Gp Capt Ret'd)
VICE CHAIRMAN	Jon Hill (Gp Capt Ret'd)
HONORARY CHAPLAIN	Father Walter Peeters
SECRETARY	Flt Lt Hannah French
TREASURER	David Trembaczowski-Ryder (Wg Cdr Ret'd)
HONORARY WELFARE OFFICER (HWO)	Mrs Ghislaine Walkden
ASSISTANT HWO	Mrs Deborah Whittingham
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Mrs Brigitte Horton
NEWSLETTER OFFICER	VACANT

For a quick answer to any query, please email: rafa.belgianbranch@gmail.com

From: Group Captain R J Whittingham FRAeS, Royal Air Force (Retired)

Brussels

20 September 2011

Dear Friends,

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

I must, I regret, start this introduction on a sad note to record the passing of our dear friend and committee colleague Charles Dumont. We remember his life and support to the air forces' community elsewhere in this Newsletter, but, I am sure that I reflect the thoughts of all our members when I express our condolences to Nicole and all his family: he will be sorely missed. Regrettably, he is not alone in our Obituary column: I am sure also that the remarks on the passing of Stan Robins and Léon de Ville will spark fond memories amongst many. 'We will remember them'.

On a happier note, you will see that in this edition we record Branch involvement in a number of past events: not least our Barry Horton Memorial Golf Tournament in July and our short notice reception for the 78 Sqn 'Home Run' team in August where our members were able to enjoy an evening with the team and with Comet Line and Royal British Legion colleagues.

The Committee have tried hard to meet the AGM direction to use Branch funds to enhance friendship and welfare amongst Branch members, and in that context, I feel pleased that the Ostend Holiday scheme is working well. Nevertheless, we have not met the AGM financial targets, and hence I would see us as being able offer a substantial subsidy for the Branch Winter Lunch on 6 December (please advise the Secretary of your attendance as requested on page 8), and to increase our welfare support at Christmas.

In this edition I am grateful to David Trembaczowski-Ryder for arranging an extract on the Comet Line from Air Cdre Pitchfork's book 'Shot Down and on the Run'. This links very nicely with the 'Home Run' reception and the planned 70th Anniversary celebrations of the founding of the Comet Line planned for 22/23 October and as described in our 'Future Events' section. We are always in need of your contributions and the Editor will be pleased to hear from you!

You will see in this edition more recognition of internet and email links. This is the way of things these days and it does enormously expand the easy availability of information and provides the Committee with a fast way to contact members. If you would like support in facilitating your access to this new medium, please contact any member of the Committee. With very best wishes to you and your families.

Yours most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dick Whittingham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

REPORTS ON PAST EVENTS

Barry Horton Memorial Golf Trophy.

The major Branch fund-raising event, the Barry Horton Memorial Golf Trophy, was held at Duisburg Military Golf Club on 8 July 2011. Once again, the DMGC and the Belgian Military Sports facility provided us with outstanding support to enable us to hold a most enjoyable and highly effective event with over 60 participants. The weather proved to be something of a challenge for the BBQ with a good Belgian mixture of sunshine and showers to keep the organiser, our Vice-Chairman Jon Hill, and the Chief Chef, Treasurer David Ryder, on their toes: as expected, they came up trumps! The ever-popular raffle once again led by Peter Bedford, supported this time by our past-Chairman Mike Connor proved to be an excellent fund-raiser. Very many thanks to all those who participated and contributed the magnificent raffle prizes. The event raised a net profit of some € 1800 which will all go to support the welfare and comradeship of Branch Members. The Committee plan a similar event next year. Extracts from the Chairman's welcome at the event are at page 7.

Belgian Armed Forces London Cenotaph Parade.

Our Standard Bearer Jean-Pierre Blanckaert represented the Branch at the annual parade of the Belgian Armed Forces in London on 17 July 2011. This event reflects the unique honour granted to Belgium to be the only non-Commonwealth country to be permitted to parade with arms at the Cenotaph in Central London. The honour was bestowed by King George V in 1934 on the death of King Albert I in recognition of the heroism and sacrifice of the Belgian Army in the 1914-18 War. This year, Belgian and British regular forces and veterans were joined by RAF Association and other ex-service and cadet organisations in remembrance of the Belgian servicemen who fell during the two World Wars and in other conflicts. Please see the last page for a photograph of our Standard Bearer at the event.

'Home Run' Commemoration

From 10 to 19 Aug 2011, a team of cyclists from Royal Air Force 78 Sqn based at RAF Benson, re-enacted the Second World War escape of one of their pilots, Flt Lt George Duffee DFC, following his escape route down the Comet Line from Netherlands through Belgium and France to Spain. The Branch supported this very worthwhile event in aid of charity, by hosting a reception at the Maison des Ailes on 11 Aug. In addition to the 78 Sqn cyclists and their support team, Branch members were pleased to be able to welcome Comèt Line veterans (including 'Nadine' – see page 10), and Comèt Kinship and Royal British Legion colleagues in a well-attended and convivial event which brought the generations together to remember the past and to reflect on the challenges facing our RAF personnel today. See also further information and photographs at page 23.

Tigelot Memorial at Jalhay

At 1600 hrs on the 2 Nov 1944, just while Belgium was enjoying its first few hours of freedom, a Halifax bomber MZ 829 KN-X of 77 Sqn took off from RAF Full Sutton in Yorkshire on a mission to Düsseldorf in Germany. The crew of 7 were all members of the Royal Canadian Air Force apart from the Flight Engineer, Sergeant Edward Payne from the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve: their average age was 22. On the return over Belgium, the aircraft crashed at Le Tigelot near Jalhay in the Ardennes, and there were no survivors. The crew are buried at the War Cemetery at Hotton.

In 1950, the mother of the navigator (Harold Le Noury) came to reflect by her son's grave and then visited the crash site at Tigelot. There she met Mr Albert Adans from Jalhay, who had been one of the first persons at the scene of the tragedy, and expressed her wish for a permanent memorial to be erected at the crash site. The following year on 21 Sep, the memorial was inaugurated by Mr Adans in the presence of General Poppe the Canadian Ambassador in Brussels, in honour of the airmen who gave their lives for our freedom: as noted on the dedication, 'Passers-by, collect your thoughts!'

Ever since, the society of the 'Memorial Canadien du Tigelot' has organised annually in August an event consisting of a religious service celebrated at Jalhay church, a wreath laying ceremony at the crash site and a memorial luncheon. This year's 60th Anniversary of the memorial was very well attended, including the representative of the Canadian Ambassador, and members of the RAFA Belgian Branch and the Royal British Legion. For the first time, the brother of Edward Payne and his son and grand-son were able to attend: a very moving experience for them all. Please see the last page for a photograph of the memorial. For more details, contact the Memorial President, Léon Boulet (leon.boulet@skynet.be) or try Facebook 'Canadian Memorial of Tigelot'.

Memorial to Colonel Remy 'Mony' Van Lierde DFC**

Following an initiative by the 'Wings of Memory' group, on 8 Sep, a ceremony was held at Geraardsbergen to inaugurate a memorial to the Belgian pilot Colonel Remy 'Mony' Van Lierde DFC** who served in the RAF in the Second World War, shooting down 6 enemy aircraft and destroying 44 V-1 flying bombs. He joined the Belgian Air Force after the war and went on to hold several important commands, including Chief of Operations to the Chiefs of Staff, Commander of 7th Fighter Wing, and as Commander of the Chièvres Air Base, before retiring in 1968. He died in 1990.

The ceremony was very well attended by Belgian military and civil dignitaries and by RAF and RAFA representatives. Our Honorary Chaplain Father Walter Peeters read a poem dedicated to the memory of Col van Lierde. In the absence of the Chairman due to the funeral of Charles Dumont, the RAFA Belgian Branch wreath was kindly laid by the Reverend Brian Llewellyn Chaplain of St George's Memorial Church at Ypres. Please see the last page for a photograph of the memorial. For more details view www.wingsofmemory.be

BARRY HORTON MEMORIAL GOLF TROPHY – 8 JULY 2011¹
CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Royal Air Forces Association Belgian Branch I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all to the Barry Horton Memorial Golf Trophy. Sadly our Branch Honorary Co-Presidents, Squadron Leader Edward Hearn and Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper cannot be with us this year, but they pass on their best wishes for the event.

Just a few words to set the scene before we get to the meat of the evening.

Firstly, very many thanks to the Duisburg Military Golf Club, in particular the President Jacques Creyf and the Committee, for hosting this event once again, and in particular thanks to Nestor de Vos for doing all the hard work in setting up and scoring the golf. Special thanks too to Patrick van de Water for all his help in allowing the use of the facilities and staffs of the Belgian Military Sports facility to support us – this event would not have been possible without his help.

Also many thanks to you all attending today: game of golf and a BBQ yes, but also a charity event so you know that it will cost you a little bit of money which will all go to support those ex-members of the Royal Air Forces in Belgium and their dependents.

I think the very sad recent death of DMGC member Jane Morffew reminds us all of the fragility of our existences: for the RAF Association in Belgium with many of our members now in their 80s and 90s, we are conscious of this on a daily basis.

Two short anecdotes if I may. I attended the funeral service for one of our members earlier this week: Stan Robins RAF Flight Lieutenant Search and Rescue pilot in the Atlantic through most of the Second World War and later a founding member of this Branch, and also a keen golfer who played into his 80s. He was 90 when he died but his daughter found in his effects a copy of our latest Newsletter which advertised this event, and he had pencilled himself in for it. Unfortunately he could not make it, but his family have very kindly made a donation which will help us to support others.

Secondly, on the prize table you will note that the first ladies and gentlemen's prizes include RAF Association inscribed pewter goblets as permanent keepsakes for the winners. These used to belong to one of our past Chairmen Tom Hennessey who died in 2003, and were very kindly donated by his daughter Mary following the death of her mother Ghislaine in February this year. We now have a small stock, so if you are unsuccessful this year, you will have other opportunities!

I will now hand over to our Branch Vice-Chairman Jon Hill who has coordinated this years event: very many thanks to Jon for his super organisation. Prizes will be presented by Brigitte Horton culminating in the magnificent trophy kindly donated by Terry Maddern for the best net score of the day.

¹ See Event report page 4

‘HOME RUN’ RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE BELGIAN BRANCH OF THE
ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION – 11 AUGUST 2011²
WELCOME ADDRESS

This is an informal gathering so, no long speeches, but on behalf of the Belgian Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association, I would like to welcome you all here this evening: in particular, Jon Bailey and the 78 Sqn team from RAF Benson, Brigitte d’Oultremont and her Comet Line colleagues, and Helen Hayward and friends from the Belgian Branch of the Royal British Legion. There are also a number who would like to have joined us, but cannot, in particular General Mike Mandl from the Belgian Air Force who so kindly arranged the accommodation for the 78 Sqn team at the Royal Military Academy here in Brussels.

Now I fully realise that as a group you all need no excuse to enjoy a party! But this evening we have not just a good excuse, but a very strong reason arising from the determination of number 78 Squadron when it re-formed at Benson in 2007 to pay particular attention to its long and proud history, starting with its initial formation in 1916. I was very much struck by the words of the current Squadron Commander in his forward to the excellent booklet on the ‘home run’ exercise, highlighting their intent to ensure that all their personnel are aware of, and hence shaped by, the Squadron history.

The story of George Duffee, shot down over Netherlands in 1943 and his subsequent escape and return to England through Belgium, France and Spain, assisted by the Comet Line, is a perfect example of that history. The fact that the team here today is re-enacting that ‘home run’ escape by bicycling the route in a very compressed timescale (compared to the 3 months of the actual escape), says much for the success of the Squadron’s intent. Especially as the Squadron has only recently returned from operations in Afghanistan. The fact that the event also commemorates the 70th anniversary of the first crossing of the Pyrenees by a Comet Line evader, is particularly fitting for this gathering.

Members of 78 Sqn, we are all, I am sure, very pleased to see you making this outstanding effort to maintain the links with the past: we wish you every success for this endeavour and all those other challenges which you find day by day in operations on the front line.

² See Event report at Page 4

BRANCH ADMINISTRATION

The Committee believes that the Newsletter is a key instrument to support the aims of the RAF Association and the needs of RAFA Belgian Branch members. You can help enhance the value of the Newsletter by offering contributions of general interest concerning memories of the past as well as practical information to foster friendship and welfare of members today. Please forward your contributions to the Editor.

To help us cut our printing and postal costs, the Newsletter is also available in electronic form for issue by email. If you are able to receive it in this way, and have not yet advised us, please let the Membership Secretary know.

RAFA is a charity operating for the benefit of its members. It would be helpful if members could maintain their subscriptions (Annual - 22 €, 4-year 60 €) by transferring funds to the RAFA Belgian Branch account BE12-0000-0482-0492 (FOR MEMBERSHIP FEES). Please note that 'Life' Membership is no longer available, but, at present, existing 'Life' members are exempt annual membership fees.

Donations are, of course, welcome at all times. Please pass to the above account noting 'DONATION'.

SUPPORT FOR FRIENDSHIP AND WELFARE

This year's AGM agreed that the Committee should seek to find ways to dispense a defined portion of Branch Funds by subsidising activities which would offer opportunities to foster friendship amongst Belgian Branch members and which would support the welfare of all members in need.

Accordingly, the Committee were able to offer an October 'Ostend Holiday' break to members at a significant discount and, happily, this opportunity was taken up by a number of our members. At the time of finalisation of this note, the holiday is still on-going, so the 'after-action' reports will have to wait until Newsletter 104. However, I can report an excellent lunch where the holidaymakers were joined by Committee and other RAFA members, and a very jolly 'cream tea' at Brugge on a slightly damp day when the sea-front was not quite at its best!

The next event to foster our Branch companionship is the Winter Lunch at the NATO Staff Centre on Tuesday 6 December. Timing is 12:30 hrs for 13:00 hrs. All Members are encouraged to attend. In accordance with AGM guidelines, the event will be significantly subsidised from Branch Funds, and hence individual costs will be kept low. For security and planning purposes please pass the information below to the Secretary by 28 Nov 11.

I/WE WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND THE BRANCH WINTER LUNCH ON 6 DEC 11

NAME AND INITIALS.....DATE OF BIRTH.....

**IF POSSIBLE, COULD THE COMMITTEE PLEASE ARRANGE TRANSPORT?*

** delete/complete as appropriate*

**I PLAN TO TRAVEL WITH*

**I WILL TAKE MY OWN CAR, REGISTRATION NUMBER*

*Send to Flt Lt Hannah French, UK Delegation to NATO, NATO HQ Evere, 1110, Brussels,
(or phone 02.707.7562 or email Hannah.French@fco.gov.uk)*

Editor's Note. The following extract from his book "Shot Down and on the Run: the RAF and Commonwealth aircrews who got home from behind enemy lines 1940-1945", is reprinted by kind permission of the author Air Commodore Graham Pitchfork. Newsletter 104 will include a further extract recounting the escape of Flight Sergeant Larry Carr. For more information on the Comet Line and its current Association Comète Kinship Belgium, go to www.cometeline.org or email comete.kinship@skynet.be. See also the 'Home Run' reports on pages 4 and 7.

The Comet Line

"I realize that patriotism is not enough. I must have no bitterness towards anyone." These were the last words of the British nurse Edith Cavell before she was shot by a German firing squad on 12 October 1915 at the Tir National in Brussels. Her crime had been to help Allied soldiers to escape to safety into Holland. Twenty-five years later, her words were to inspire another generation of Belgians who found they were living under the occupation of Hitler's Germany.

With her country occupied, 24-year-old trained nurse Andrée de Jongh (known as "Dédée") decided she must return to her parents' home at Schaerbeek in Brussels to tend the wounded, and arrange for them to be kept at a series of safe houses before helping them to escape. Many Belgians came forward to help, with her father, Frédéric, headmaster of the boys' school at Place Gaucheret, taking a leading role. Once France had been occupied, she established a route through Paris to St Jean de Luz near Biarritz in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Safe houses were established along the route, and mountain guides were organized and routes chosen to take the "parcels" across the mountains to San Sebastian in Spain. Her father co-ordinated the transfer of evaders on the Brussels-Paris route, and her aunt, Elvire de Greef ("Tante Go"), organized the operations in St Jean de Luz. Tante Go involved all her family, including her husband, Fernand, who worked as an interpreter for the Germans, which gave him access to blank identity cards and passes for the Forbidden Zone along the Atlantic coast. Most of the couriers escorting the evaders were young men and women, all under the age of 25. Dédée herself escorted the evaders from Paris to the Pyrenees before accompanying them over the mountains to San Sebastian with a fearless Basque, Florentino Giocoechea, whom she recruited as her chief guide.

In August 1941 she delivered three evaders to the British Consul in Bilbao, and sought a meeting with the Consul to explain the capabilities of her organization. She explained that she needed funds, but insisted that her line must remain under Belgian control, and the Consul undertook to alert London. On her next crossing a month later, Michael Cresswell ("Monday") from the British Embassy in Madrid travelled to Bilbao to meet her. He was captivated by her vitality, courage and initiative. As a result, the "Comet Line" was firmly established, and "Monday" met Dédée in Bilbao after every journey, this becoming the routine way of passing messages and funds.

The Gestapo were aware that there was an escape line, and made strenuous efforts to uncover it, including infiltrating bogus aircrew into the system. Frédéric de Jongh was forced to move to Paris in April 1942, when Baron Jean Greindl ("Nemo") assumed control in Brussels, working from the Swedish Red Cross canteen. Frédéric continued to organize the Paris operation, where he recruited new couriers, including young sisters Andrée and Michele Dumon ("Nadine" and "Michou"). Nineteen-year-old Nadine took more than 20 evaders to Paris from the Belgian collecting points before her arrest in the summer and imprisonment in Ravensbruck. Her 20-year-old sister Michou became one of the line's most successful operators after the arrest of Dédée before having to evade herself, arriving in England in May 1944. Assisting in the dangerous crossing of the Pyrenees was Albert Johnson, an Englishman who had remained behind in France after the German occupation, and a young Belgian, Baron Jean-François Nothomb ("Franco").

Tragedy struck in Brussels on 19 November 1942 with the arrest of many of the key helpers following infiltration of the line by Gestapo agents posing as shot-down Allied aircrew. Dédée was so concerned for the safety of her father that she finally persuaded him in January 1943 to leave for England, and she took him among a party of evaders to St Jean de Luz. On 15 January, the weather for the crossing of the mountains was considered too bad for Frédéric de Jongh to travel, so Dédée set off on her 19th journey without him, and headed for the home in Urrugne of Francia Usandizaga, who ran the last safe house before the Pyrenees crossing. Just before the guide Florentino arrived at the rendezvous, the Gestapo raided the house, capturing Dédée, Francia and three evaders. On capture, Dédée tried to persuade the Gestapo that she was the leader of Comet in order to take pressure off the others. The Gestapo would not believe that such a young and slight girl could be running such a complex organization. In due course, she and Francia were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, from where Francia did not return.

With the line broken, Frédéric de Jongh and Nothomb returned to reorganize the Paris link, leaving Tante Go and Albert Johnson to establish new links in the south-west. Fortunately, Florentino avoided capture to continue with his vital role as chief mountain guide. Unfortunately, a traitor, Jacques Desoubrie (alias Jean Masson), had infiltrated the northern section of the line. Jean Greindl was arrested in Brussels in early February, and Desoubrie betrayed Frédéric de Jongh on 7 June. It has been estimated that Desoubrie betrayed over 50 members of the Comet Line, and his treachery almost wiped it out. After the war, he was tried and executed by the French authorities. Under sentence of death, Jean Greindl was killed in an Allied bombing raid. On 28 March 1944, 60-year-old Frédéric de Jongh was taken from his prison cell with two friends to face a German firing squad. After the war, his school was renamed "Ecole de Frédéric de Jongh" in his memory.

In the south, Albert Johnson was arrested, but Tante Go managed to obtain his release, and it was decided that he should return to England. He had escorted no fewer than 122 evaders over the Pyrenees. Jean-François Nothomb travelled to Spain to discuss the continuation of the Comet Line with "Monday", returning to take over Dédée's role of

escorting evaders from Paris to San Sebastian. Michou continued to act as a courier on the route to the south despite the grave risks she ran following her exposure to the Germans by a collaborator. Others were recruited, allowing more evaders to escape to Spain. However, Nothomb was arrested in January 1944, and sent to a concentration camp. He had escorted 215 evaders over the mountains, a number exceeded only by Dédée herself who had taken 218. In the months ahead of the Allied invasion in June 1944, it became too dangerous to take evaders south by train because of the intensive bombing campaign against the French railway system. However, a number travelled south, and Florentino took two RAF sergeants over on 4 June 1944. They were the last customers of the Comet Line.

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The final word on the Comet Line must be reserved for its creator, the remarkable Andrée de Jongh (“Dédée”) who took over 200 airmen to safety across the Pyrenees on 218 journeys. After her arrest, she spent two years in Ravensbruck concentration camp, returning seriously ill. She recovered to return to nursing, becoming a sister in a leper colony in the Belgian Congo. In later years the King of the Belgians made Andrée de Jongh a countess. Among her many awards was the George Medal, which she received from King George VI in 1946. She was a remarkable young woman among remarkable people.

Submitted by David Trembaczowski-Ryder

EXHORTATION

A long time ago, they all were comrades in wartime. Afterwards they remained friends for a lifetime. So many common memories have made their bond together. Courage and determination were shown for serving Her Majesty the Queen and the beloved countries and the common cause.

For years we have been a band of brothers. As age wears on, illness puts an end to long-lasting lives. That's when we feel sorrow for the loss of our faithful friends. Only our memories and prayers matter to keep them alive forever.

Their commitment remains a lesson and a guide for youngsters today to follow that example. May new generosity be the marker of hope for the future of our countries.

Father Walter Peeters,
RAFA Belgian Branch
Honorary Chaplain

IN MEMORIAM

Charles Dumont 24 Dec 1925 – 4 Sep 2011. Dear friend and RAFA Belgian Branch Committee colleague who was a stalwart supporter of the Branch over many years and who will be sorely missed. Belgian volunteer, trained with the RAF, but the Second World War finished before he could see active service. He was an initiator of the recording of the locations of the aircraft downed on Belgian territory in World War II and as now displayed in the Military Aviation Museum. Awarded Belgian and United Kingdom Second World War Medals.

Léon De Ville de Goyet 19 Mar 1923 - 19 Jul 2011. RAFA Belgian Branch colleague since 1985. Belgian volunteer enlisting in the RAF after the liberation of Belgium in 1944, who completed his training without seeing combat, and served with the RAF and the Belgian Air Force before joining Sabena, rising to become Captain on Boeing 747.

Stanley Robins Flt Lt RAF 7 Nov 1920 – 27 Jun 2011. RAFA Belgian Branch colleague since 1977. Following schooling in UK, his Brussels University course was interrupted in 1940 when he saw war service in the Royal Air Force, trained in Canada and Iceland as a Pilot and was posted to Coastal Command with rank of Flight Lieutenant. Altogether, he spent some six years in the service, on long-range reconnaissance, anti-submarine flights, convoy escort and meteorological flights. Awarded the Atlantic Star, the Defence Medal and the 39-45 Medal.

IN MEMORIAM



Charles-
Stanislas
Dumont

24 Dec 1925 –
4 Sep 2011

Flt Lt Stanley
Robins

7 Nov 1920 –
27 Jun 2011



EVENTS CALENDAR

7-9 Oct - European Area RAFA Conference at Paphos Cyprus. Chairman plus 2 Committee members will attend: others wishing to participate are invited to contact the Chairman and view the RAFA Cyprus website www.rafacyprus.co.uk.

15 Oct (NB correction to date) - Belgian Air Force Parade at Cinquantenaire, Brussels, marking the 65th Anniversary of foundation of Belgian Air Force. No details available at time of publication: please contact the Secretary for latest information.

15 Oct - Commemoration at Waasmunster of 70th anniversary of the crash of Handley Page Hampden AD 975 KM-N of 44 "Rhodesian" Squadron RAF. Church service at Waasmunster Church at 10:00 hrs, followed at 11:00 hrs by memorial dedication at the Cemetery, and a reception and subsequent lunch at the Castle Blauwendael. Those interested should view Wings of Memory www.wingsofmemory.be or contact Dirk de Quick at dirk.de.quick@telenet.be

22/23 Oct - commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the first functioning of the Comète Line. Any non-Comète Kinship members who are interested in participating in the events shown below are invited to contact the Chairman before 4 October:

Saturday 22 Oct at the Espace Delvaux, Rue Grates 3, 1170 Watermael-Boitsfort starting at 15:00 hrs, private pre-premiere showing of the documentary film 'The Last Passage' (see <http://elultimopaso.net>) followed by a 'vin d'honneur'.

Sunday 23 Oct at 11:30 hrs, Mass at the Basilique de Koekelberg and homage at the Comète Stained glass window and in the RAF Chapel, followed at 13:45 hrs by lunch at Maison des Ailes, Rue Montoyer 1, 1040 Brussels.

1 Nov - Commemoration at the Belgian and RAF Memorials at the Belgian Cemetery at Evere.

9 Nov - Veterans Reception hosted by the British Ambassador to Belgium, Jonathan Brenton, 18:00 – 20:00, Rue Ducale 17, 1000 Brussels. Entrance will be on presentation of invitation only. If you would like to attend, please contact the Branch Secretary before 24 Oct.

11 Nov - Armistice Day.

13 Nov - Remembrance Sunday: 12:00 hrs at Holy Trinity, Brussels, followed by lunch organised by the Royal British Legion (cost 20 Euro: contact RBL Secretary Andrée Ferrant 0494 619 665 or email andree.ferrant@hotmail.com for enquiries and bookings).

6 Dec - 12:30 hrs, Branch Winter Lunch at the NATO Staff Centre: all Members are encouraged to attend. Costs will be supported from Branch funds in accordance with AGM guidelines. Please contact the Secretary or complete and return the proforma at page 8 if would like to attend.

15 Mar 12 - 11:00 hrs, Branch Annual General Meeting to be held at NATO Staff Centre, followed by lunch. All Branch members encouraged to attend.

The Chronicle of a Passer By

By Edward Harty Elliot Hearn

Editor's Note:

This third episode of our Branch Honorary Co-President's 'Chronicle' as transcribed by Gp Capt (Ret'd) Mike Connor, contains extracts from Part 2 Chapter 1 covering the years 1940 to 1943: joining the RAF and the trials and tribulations of pilot and then navigator training, concluding with his arrival on his first operational squadron. Please see Newsletter 101 for the Contents List.

PART TWO – 1940 -1946

Suddenly, as he sat there, the delight of being free
went through him with a stab of wonder.

“Fair Stood the Wind for France”

H.E. Bates

1. Moths, Balloons and Power Lines

Of course I knew what I had to do. It was inevitable.

.....

There was no difficulty in my obtaining a day off and I chose a Thursday. Instead of going to the office at nine in the morning, I boarded a bus and went to Maidstone. There I found the recruiting office and signed on with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve as an aircrew applicant. I chose the Air Force for no other reason than I had always remembered walking home from school some years beforehand with a friend and we had both stopped to watch a silver glimpse in the sky. My friend, who was older than I, said it was an airplane and it must be at least three thousand feet up in the air. The sky had been completely cloudless and, against the blue, the glitter of the moving machine seemed to portray the power of man over the elements of nature.

.....

Eventually the papers came. I packed my small bag with my few belongings, bade farewell to my family and made my way up to Uxbridge for the medical examination and the answering of questions on a printed form – Do you drive a car? – Can you swim? – Have you ever had a serious illness? I faithfully wrote down the correct answers to all the questions except the one about swimming. Although I was born and bred by the seaside and my Father was a mariner, I had never learned how to

swim. I answered 'yes' to the swimming question believing that a negative answer might damage my selection.

All this passed off well and I was accepted for pilot training. I was kitted out with an ill-fitting uniform, a forage cap with a white band and service boots. I was posted to Babbacombe, on the Devon coast near Torquay, to experience the first taste of military discipline under the eye of a regular Sergeant who relished his job. The cliff top at Babbacombe was rather a pleasant place and turning raw recruits into a semblance of order in a four-week initiation period was a task the success of which would ensure the continuance of residence of the Sergeant in educating the monthly intake of trainees to the military world. It was Spring in the year 1941 and the outdoor exercises took place in very pleasant weather making the first days in the Royal Air Force a much more pleasant experience than our fears had anticipated.

The four week introductory period over, I was sent to Stratford on Avon, where a newly opened Initial Training Wing had been established. I was billeted on the top floor of the partly requisitioned Shakespeare Hotel where I shared a room with four other aspirants.

Babbacombe had been a holiday compared with what we were now to go through. Ten hours per day were spent in marching to and undertaking lectures in different parts of the town – days occupied with the Morse code, aerodynamics, aircraft identification, combustion engines, advanced mathematics, photography, elementary navigation and rifle practice.

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After barely ten weeks, we sat the examinations, both written and oral, in all the subjects taken during our stay. Those who passed all the tests at the first attempt attended a passing out parade. Then came a period of waiting for a posting. My posting came much later than many of the others and I was to see the departure of many newly made friends. We had all been in our twenties and thirties, young, inexperienced and from varied and different social backgrounds, but astonishingly capable of getting on well together.

My orders eventually came and it was to Sealand on the Wirral, dominated by Birkenhead and Liverpool on the right and by the Welsh mountains on the left. Sealand was a long established Air Force training centre and here we would be initiated into the art of flying. We were housed in traditional barracks, twelve beds to a room and subject to the disciplines of the space we occupied, which included the rota duty of scrubbing the floor. I was allocated to 'B' Flight under the command and instructions of Flight Lieutenant Smith, an ex-fighter pilot as signified by the unfastened top button of his uniform jacket. We were to find that he was a very sensitive regular officer with the odd phenomenon of being very nervous on the ground and strangely firm in the air.

Sealand had no hard runways and was a very large grass landing field, ideal for the Tiger Moths we were about to fly. My initial flight was the first time I had ever been airborne. Nervously enthralling would be the way to describe it. Strapped in, my instructor first described and explained the purpose of the instruments and controls. The propeller was swung and we were away and turning into the wind. The Flight Lieutenant continued to talk as he opened the throttle, telling me to watch the air speed

indicator and when the tail of the aircraft should be lifted as we gathered speed. The contrast between racing over the grass and taking to the air was the first exhilarating experience. Then we were going up and up, the instructor taking us to a thousand feet before he pushed the stick forward and we were riding level. I was surprised to find the joystick extremely sensitive and even slight pressure had an effect on the machine. I felt that I was handling something so delicate that even a slight touch would send us tumbling earthwards.

In the process of manoeuvring, by banking first to the left and then to the right, gently pulling the stick back to climb and forward to descend, using the throttle to increase speed on turns while constantly using the horizon as a bench mark, I became aware of the force of the wind as it passed through the wing struts and the real sensation of flying through the air. Although strapped into the cockpit, banked turns gave the impression of possibly falling out as I looked over the side at the slow moving ground below.

The instructor again took over, completed a circuit of the airfield and continued his instructions as we came into land. We passed over the boundary hedge, the throttle was pulled back, the nose brought up and our machine dropped onto its two front and one rear wheels. We then taxied slowly towards the parking area in front of our Flight hut.

How did I feel? Pleased to go up and gratified to come down? As enthusiastic as my colleagues who had been through the same baptism? Perhaps a little nervous because of the excitement?

The weeks passed with extraordinary rapidity because of the crash programme. Lectures were combined with drill and one hours flying each day. We progressed from elementary flying to more complex manoeuvres such as deliberately stalling our machine at the top of a climb and with hard pressure on the rudder to the left or right forcing the resultant spin. Spinning round and heading for the ground, the spin was stopped by applying opposite rudder, levelling the aircraft, opening the throttle and aligning the horizon.

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In my fourteenth hour of flying I was sent up on my first solo flight. The average time taken by pupils to achieve this objective was ten hours of dual flying. From this, one could gather that I was a less than average pilot at this stage.

To this day, I distinctly remember this first venture alone in the air with the machine which I had taken some time to gain confidence in. Strapped in, propeller swung, goggles down, I opened up the throttle and it was the feeling of power as speed gathered over the grass that gave me assurance and stability. Gathering speed, I pushed forward on the joystick, brought the tail up and when flying speed was attained pulled back slightly on the control column and parted with the ground. Then, gently forward on the stick at the same time increasing power by manipulation of the throttle. After a short period of low flying, I rose to five hundred feet then straight ahead followed by a careful slow turn to the left. Again, another slow turn, keeping the airfield in view. One more turn and it was the approach for landing. Over the boundary of the field, I reduced speed and went steadily forward until a few feet from the ground. Carefully

following the Flight Lieutenant's instructions, I cut the engine following judgement of the height, pulled the nose up and I and my machine were down! Any misjudgement of height prior to landing would mean a bounce and, if the bounce was a real banger, that would have meant opening up the throttle and going round again.

On returning to the dispersal point in front of our Flight hut, I could hardly suppress the feeling of achievement. The Flight Commander came out to the Tiger Moth and helped me out of the aircraft and murmured his congratulations. On thinking back, I realised that a failed pupil was a setback for him after all the risks he had taken in the training of young inexperienced pilots. So I was able to join my companions who had already gone solo. I think they had been as anxious for me as I was for myself.

The tempo of the course increased both on the ground and in the air. On the ground, examinations were approaching. In the air, our daily flights were mixed with solo and dual flying – dual flying to ensure that the instructor's programme of exercises was being properly carried out. There was increased handling of the aircraft – steep turns, rolls off the top, stall turns, spins and short distance navigation exercises.

On one of these exercises I had been detailed to practise stalling the aircraft and spinning it at the point of stall. It was a normal solo exercise. I took off at eight in the morning, rose to three thousand feet and carried out my prescribed stalls and spins three times. I returned to base after forty minutes to find all the ground crew, my colleagues and the Flight Commander gathered in front of the Flight hut. I did not know that the reception was for me until the Flight Commander stepped forward and angrily demanded what I thought I had been doing. I could not think of anything exceptional during my early morning flight and replied that I had been carrying out the prescribed exercise. I was told in no uncertain terms that I had been reported as being seen flying through the balloon barrage over Liverpool and Birkenhead, a restricted area. However, I got away with it mostly because I had created a certain amount of stupefied entertainment. I was unaware of seeing any balloons or cables!

One other incident in this initial period of solo flying was more catastrophic. We had been detailed to undertake a cross-country exercise which would take us over the Wirral, northern Wales and then back to the airfield, a scheduled one hour flight. The weather forecast was that there would be low cloud, but visibility would be good. This forecast proved to be incorrect. The weather became very rough over Wales with very low cloud and driving rain.

In an open cockpit this made visual navigation very difficult. I soon became painfully aware that I was not going to make it back to base because my petrol gauge was hovering over the empty mark. I searched for a likely place to get down and, after several minutes circling around and peering over the cockpit in the pouring rain, I found an 'L' shaped field which looked ideal because it was flat with no apparent obstructions. As I approached for the landing, what I had not seen struck my right hand wings. On impact, the power line electric cable caused my Tiger Moth to turn right over, plunging it nose first into the ground.

Fortunately, being strapped in, the thump of my head on the dashboard was not serious and I was only temporarily stunned. I quickly realised the danger of fire, released my safety strap and scrambled out of the stricken aircraft. Somewhat dazed, I

then saw another Moth circling in the sky above me and I feebly waved to try and warn the pilot about my unseen power line. He waved back, but he had clearly seen the cause of my mishap because he avoided the power line and made a perfect landing close to where I was standing. Out jumped the pilot – a fellow cadet called Bland – and he came running over to see if I was alright. Bland confirmed that he had enough petrol and that he was capable of taking off in the narrow field and getting back to base, which, as good as he was, he did. As for myself, a jeep was sent to pick me up and arrangements were made to send a crash wagon to collect the badly damaged Tiger Moth.

This episode did not end there. The very next morning at eight o'clock, the Flight Commander ordered me out with him to a waiting aircraft. With hardly a word passing between us, he took over the controls and, when sufficient height had been gained, there began a terrifying thirty minutes of extraordinary aerobic flying which tried everything the aircraft was capable of doing. Down and down to maximum speed, jerking back and up again and rolling over the top. Then down and up again, stalling, sharp rudder, tight spin, oversteep turns and side slipping, all the time the wind screaming through the wing struts and beating against the cockpit.

In brief moments of trying to concentrate, I caught the Flight Commander's eyes looking at me through his goggles and via the reverse mirror. He looked grim and purposeful as he swung the aircraft into almost impossible situations. Most of the time I just felt numb, being on the outside of all that was happening, clinging on and resigning myself to the inevitable.

We landed in the same silence in which we had taken off. To my surprise the Flight Lieutenant helped me out of the cockpit and down on to the ground. "You alright?" he asked looking directly at me. "Yes. OK Sir" I replied somewhat humbly.

We walked back to the Dispersal Huts. On the way he took me by the arm and suddenly asked me what I would like to go onto next – single or multi-engined aircraft. By now I had well understood that the hectic aerobatics were a test of my nerves after yesterday's crash.

His question meant that I had passed that test and it was with relief that I briefly thought over the answer before replying. I could not honestly say that I enjoyed being alone in the air; other trainee pilots asked for nothing more. I felt that I needed the reassurance of company in these flying machines. Somehow, even the scaring experience of the previous half hour's aerobatics had not troubled me, possibly because of the reassuring company of the man up front. I opted for multi-engined aircraft.

I think he had already made up his own mind on this. Despite his risky manoeuvring of the machine during that thirty minutes of hazardous flying, he had been calculating the effect on his pupil and had probably been dwelling on the problem for some time. Seeing that I had overcome the effect of the previous day's crash and had apparently not been fearful of disaster in his deliberate risky flying, he had made his own judgement and simply nodded at the reply to his question.

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The course came to a conclusion with the holding of examinations in all the subjects with which we had been occupied over the previous weeks. I achieved average pass marks in all subjects and solo flying certification. Some of us were then posted straight away to America for further training on Harvard single-engined aircraft. We learnt later that their destination was Pensacola, not too distant from New Orleans, which made the rest of us rather envious. I was sent to a holding centre at Peterborough. After spending a month there with very little flying, I received orders to proceed to Greenock in Scotland to await shipment to Canada.

We left Scotland packed like sardines in a banana boat. It took fourteen days to reach Halifax because we stood still for three days off the coast of Newfoundland weathering a hefty storm. There were so many of us in that ship that I, together with other companions, slept on the mess decks. We spent several restless nights slithering up and down the tables and often down on to the mess deck. Apart from the storm, we had several submarine alerts during the many days and nights at sea, but none of us ever saw another ship throughout the voyage.

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My destination was North Battleford in the wilds of Saskatchewan, the prairie land of Canada. We had already received information that at this Flying Training School we would be flying Oxfords, and there they were, lined up on the airfield, painted yellow, their twin engines silently welcoming the new intake. We had also been warned that these aircraft had a tendency to swing violently on landing and that recovery from a spin was impossible.

We were still at the beginning of winter at the start of 1942 and it was exceptionally cold even during the days of brilliant sunshine. The climate was very dry which made low temperatures supportable, but the reflex glare of the sun coming off the snow covered countryside took a bit of getting used to. I was to be troubled by that later.

North Battleford itself was a small prairie town, but it prided itself on having a Mounted Police outpost. During our rare visits into the town, it was the Mounted Policeman with his wife who entertained and fed us. He kept an album of his exploits and our evenings were enlivened by his stories of bandit chasing. The airfield was a self contained unit, little being provided in the way of leisure, its main purpose being the continuance of training and practice in flying multi-engined aircraft.

We quickly realised the relative carefree operation of the Tiger Moth when confronted with the complexities of the Oxfords. The initial dual pilot control drilled into us the disciplines of taking off and landing. We then went on to more advanced exercises such as cutting off one engine, maintaining level flight on one engine and restarting the stopped engine. After four weeks I was allowed to take full control of the aircraft with no second pilot instructor with me in the cockpit. It was about this time that I began to have trouble with my eyes, waking in the morning with a glaze between the eyes and eyelids. I did not report this ailment because the training course was near its end and I wanted to complete this long period of preparation at the same time as my fellow cadets.

Late one afternoon I was sent up on a routine flight and when I got back to base dusk was already falling. Because of other aircraft in the circuit, I was ordered to circle over the airfield and await instructions to land. By the time I received the signal to touch down, it was dark and the flarepath lights were switched on. I had never flown at night before and struggled to see through the darkened shapes below. On the crosswind leg I went through the drill – UMPFTS – undercarriage, mixture, pitch, flaps, trim, speed and then came in to land. Easing the heavy aircraft over the boundary hedge, I lightly pushed the throttles forward to make a powered landing. The front wheels touched terra firma. Suddenly, without warning, the Oxford swung violently and I quickly realised that I had momentarily lost control. I careered off the runway on to the grass verge and frantically tried to correct the swing as the aircraft raced between petrol bowsers, trucks and parked aircraft. I managed to straighten the swing only to see that I was heading directly towards a hangar. At the last second, with the slower speed, I turned the aircraft and missed the hangar by no more than fifteen centimetres. Exhausted, I slumped over the controls for what seemed an interminable time but which, in fact, could only have been seconds. Loosening my straps, I eventually clambered out of the aircraft. There was an official enquiry and, despite my protests or excuses, I was taken off the course and this within days of completing it. The severe decision which had been taken against me caused acute chagrin. For me, after two hundred hours of pilot training, my future as a pilot was terminated. I was reclassified and posted to a Navigation School at Portage la Prairie in mid-west Canada.

My eight weeks there passed without incident. Along with navigation exercises – in Canada one could see ones planned destination fifty miles away because, unlike the United States, all towns and villages were lit with street lights – I flew Ansons, Fairey Battles, fired at drogues, simulated bombing and generally passed a peaceful, if regretful two months before passing out and being commissioned.

The journey back to England was in the Queen Mary. Even as a troop ship it was luxury compared with the outgoing banana boat. This time the voyage only took six days. For part of the time we even had a destroyer escort. We were allotted space in four berth cabins and were even served at table. Instead of sleepless nights on bench tops, we slept between sheets and there was plenty of room for jogging and promenades on the Queen Mary's numerous decks. We landed at Southampton. Those of us who had been commissioned were granted a short leave in which to order and fit our uniforms.

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Time passed quickly and, when my leave ended, I took the train to London, picked up my uniform from Austin Reed's the tailors then travelled on to Kinloss, an Operational Training Unit in the North of Scotland.

Kinloss, like Sealand, was a permanent Royal Air Force Station with solid brick barracks. It had hard runways, twin engine nose down Whitley aircraft and a New Zealand Scottish Station Commander noted for his discipline. This discipline was enforced from the day of my arrival but aircrew, Officers and non-Commissioned ranks, were encouraged to mix during duty hours, the object being that crews of seven members each be formed by mutual agreement. At meal times and during the evenings, Officers and non-Commissioned ranks went to their respective messes.

This division in ranks, although forming crews subject to the same dangers, did not disturb the growing friendship between the seven new chosen acquaintances. The six other members of my own crew included a rotund twenty year old volunteer from the United States Air Force, a tall lean and cadaverous Canadian of mature age, a minute and wiry wireless operator from the West Country, a dour Yorkshireman and two Londoners. They were all Sergeants and came from all sections of society. We soon developed a common respect for each other which was to unfold into deep companionship.

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Completing the course at Kinloss, our crew was posted to Wigsley in Lincolnshire, a Conversion Unit from light to heavy bomber aircraft. The rumours we had heard concerning the aircraft we were about to fly were fully confirmed. The Manchester with two Vulture engines was seriously underpowered, difficult to handle and grossly unmanoeuvrable. There had been many accidents on these machines and we spent an apprehensive four weeks flying them. It was with some relief that we were eventually posted to our first operational squadron. The long period of training was over and we were about to commence the duty for which we had enlisted. Our designated Squadron was No 50 based at Skellingthorpe, a subsidiary airfield to the larger one at Waddington, and both were situated a short distance away from the Cathedral City of Lincoln.

We were a small Unit, just one squadron with nine Lancaster aircraft and no more than fifty officers occupying the small Mess. The limited space included a common room, bar and dining area. The result created an atmosphere of intimacy which I was later to discover could have painful consequences.

My living accommodation was a single plain room in a Nissen hut, where heating was provided by a small cast iron stove. There was a dresser and tiny mirror in a corner of the room and the service bed was on the other side. The room was clean and tidy, obviously prepared after the departure of the previous occupant who had been reported missing a few nights before.

During my first night in the Mess, operations had been called off because of bad weather. Because of the late cancellation, most of the officers were there including the Wing Commander. He introduced me to each one in turn and ordered a drink. I felt immediately at home and belonging to this small community. That first evening was spent chatting around the fireside with my new companions.

The Squadron exercises preliminary to operational sorties commenced the day after our arrival. Our crew was allocated 'Z' for zebra, number 810, and our Squadron initials 'VN'. Our aircraft was generally called 'VN Z'.

We immediately took to the Lancaster, an improved version of the Manchester with four engines instead of two - thank God! It was a beautiful aircraft in exterior design, very manoeuvrable and pleasant to ride in even though the interior was mostly bare metal. My companions were also happy with the new aircraft and with their surroundings. Despite the tales of heavy losses, we were satisfied with our place in the Squadron.

To be Continued

HOME RUN RECEPTION – 11 AUG 11



The 78 Sqn team with RAFA Belgian Branch members, Comet Line veterans and members of the Comète Kinship and the Belgian Branch of the Royal British Legion

78 Sqn Team Leader with Comet Line Veterans

Left: Francois Roberti-Lintermans – “Bob”
Centre: Sgt Jon Bailey – 78 Sqn
Right: Andréé Dumon “Nadine”



Standard Bearers and Comet Line Veteran

Left: Freddy Roiseux – Comet Line
Centre: Jean-Pierre Blanckaert – RAFA
Belgian Branch
Right: Francois Roberti-Lintermans – “Bob”

Photographs courtesy of the RBL Belgian Branch

MEMORIALS



Standard Bearers prepare for the parade of Belgian Forces at the Cenotaph, London 17 Jul 2011. Centre: RAFA Belgian Branch Standard Bearer Jean-Pierre Blanckaert

60th Anniversary of the Tigelot Memorial to Halifax MZ 829, crashed 2 Nov 44

HF Le Noury, REB Pike, VJ Lazier, FJ Judges, WH Hanes, WW Lankin, EJ Payne



Memorial to Colonel Remy 'Mony' Van Lierde DFC**

1915-1990

Geraardsbergen 8 Sep 11

