

**BELGIAN BRANCH NEWSLETTER**

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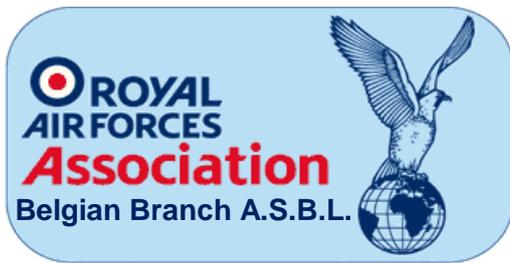
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***NEWSLETTER NO 107***

***JUL – AUG – SEP 2012***

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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  
**Honorary 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 Corbett MBE MA BA RAF

## BELGIAN BRANCH COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN	Robert (Dick) Whittingham (Gp Capt Ret'd)
VICE CHAIR	Wg Cdr Gillian Ward
HONORARY CHAPLAIN	Father Walter Peeters
SECRETARY	Flt Lt Arlene Walker
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
BRANCH WEBMASTER	Bob Jenkins (Wg Cdr Ret'd)

*For a quick answer to any query, please email: [rafa.belgianbranch@gmail.com](mailto:rafa.belgianbranch@gmail.com)*

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

Brussels  
4 September 2012

Dear Friends,

### **CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**

It may be the new, and rather special, perspective of 'retirement', but I remember an excellent Belgian summer this year: not everyone may agree! However, the last few weeks have certainly given us lots of sunshine and I am hopeful (confident?) that we have a few more weeks of warmth before Autumn sets in. Thinking back to our recent events, the Barry Horton Memorial Golf Tournament was a great success, with a full house enjoying the perfect weather for both golf and the barbeque, and enabling us to raise over €2500 for the good of our colleagues here in Belgium: very many thanks to all those who participated and gave so willingly of their time and money. Likewise the moving ceremony of the Annual Memorial at Tigelot was held in brilliant sunshine and I think we were all grateful that the restaurant is now air-conditioned. Similarly even our Standard Bearer enjoyed the one sunny day in London when he represented us at the Belgian Parade at the Cenotaph.

In this issue, as well as reporting on our past events, I seek your support (overleaf) for this year's Wings Appeal: I find a nice sense of continuity that we are able to use a Newsletter poster from 25 years ago and find that it still fits the bill precisely. Please give generously to help the Branch do its duty to the Association as a whole.

I am pleased to be able to report that our Honorary Co-President Edward Hearn and Paule, have recently had a very satisfactory move to a super apartment just around the corner from their old house: I know that they would be very pleased to hear from old colleagues. As part of their move, I have acquired a few more of the old back numbers of the Newsletter, and include some extracts of interest in this issue. I am still missing Numbers 1 to 7: can anyone help to enable us to complete the archive?

Sadly we have a number of obituaries in this issue. These accounts of bravery and exploits in the 40s are very heartening: it is an honour to include them. The thread that runs through all these events, and which is at the core of the Association, is comradeship. Our Honorary Chaplain takes up this theme in his 'Thoughts': I am very conscious that we could always do more to support those whose lives are now challenged. Please assist where you can and let me know if you are aware of others who would benefit from contact.

It is sad for us, but good news for her, that our Secretary has been promoted and is posted back to UK shortly. Hannah has done a super job in support of the Branch, and I am sure everyone will join with me in offering warm thanks and to wish her every success in her future career. I am pleased to say that her successor Flt Lt Arlene Walker will take over as Secretary. Lastly, let me draw your attention to the Future Events and in particular to the changed date for the Branch Winter Lunch, now Monday 10 December 2012: all are welcome, if you need transport, please contact a Committee member.

Yours most sincerely,



## RAFA WINGS APPEAL

*(Note from the Chairman)*

The Royal Air Forces Association is a membership organisation and a registered charity that provides welfare support to the RAF Family. The Association receives no government contributions, and hence its work is completely funded by the generosity of the members and through vital donations from supporters in the general public and from businesses.

The RAF Family includes all serving and ex-serving personnel and their dependants. In particular, for us in Belgium, it includes those many Belgians who fought with the RAF in the dark days of the Second World War.

The Association exists in the recognition that RAF personnel and their immediate families dedicate their lives to their country, and to ensure that such a sacrifice does not result in suffering, poverty or loneliness.

Whether it's an injured airman fighting to get back on his feet, a young child missing their parent away on overseas operations, or a veteran and his family needing support in advancing years, the Association is here to help all generations of RAF Service personnel and their families.

The aims and values of the Association are to provide Friendship (comradeship to use an older term), Welfare and Support to members to match their needs. Achievement of these aims requires:

*Firstly* the time and energy of volunteers to identify and assist those in need. The Branch Committee members provide the lead here, but other members and their families can do much to assist by devoting a little time to a phone call, letter or visit to colleagues. A little can mean so much. Do please help where you can.

*Secondly* it requires money. In the Belgian Branch, our fund-raising efforts are intentionally focused in the first instance in meeting the needs of our members in Belgium. As reported elsewhere in this Newsletter, thanks to the strong support of many non-members as well as colleagues, we have raised € 2500 this year, and this will go a long way to helping our community. However, we also draw significant financial support from Central RAFA funds and from the RAF Benevolent Fund. As a Branch we have a duty to contribute as best we can to support RAFA as a whole.

This is the object of the Annual Wings Appeal.

In days gone by, when the Branch had an active membership of over 400, I see that we regularly won the prize for the Overseas Branch making the largest contribution (over a quarter of a million Belgian Francs in some years). We cannot hope to match that now, but I would ask you please to now contribute what you can. The poster on the next page is from 25 years ago: its message remains valid today – even the bank account number is correct although the modern international form is as below. Please note 'WINGS APPEAL 2012' on your transfer. Very many thanks

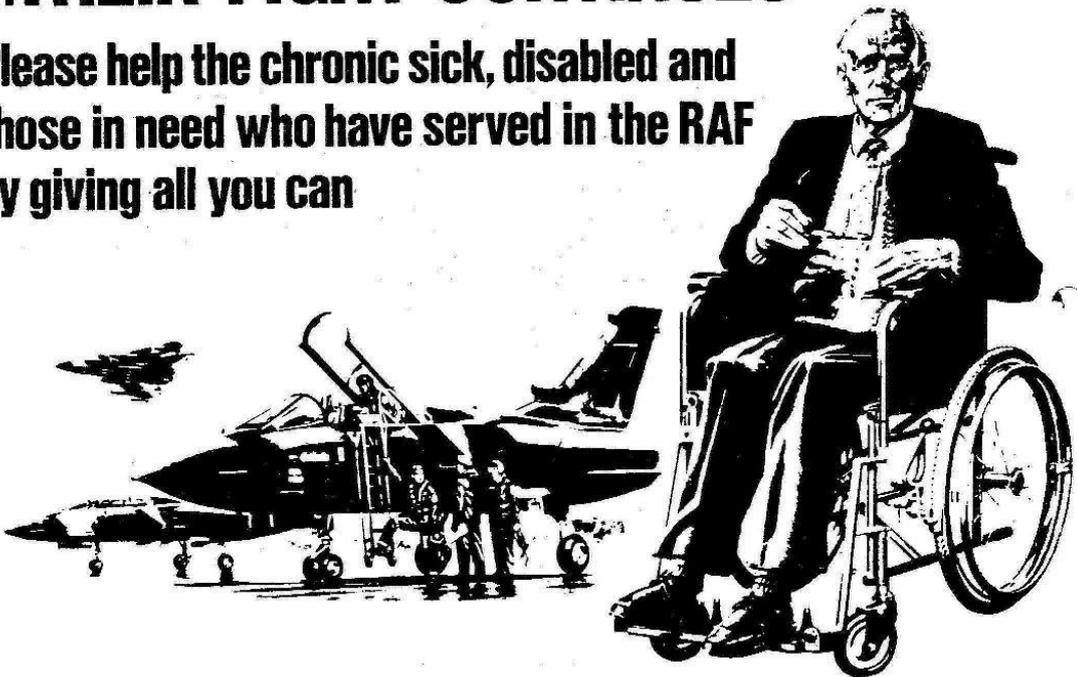
RAFA CCP ACCOUNT: BE-0000-0482-0492

**THEY WERE THERE**



**...THEIR FIGHT CONTINUES**

**Please help the chronic sick, disabled and those in need who have served in the RAF by giving all you can**



**SALUTE THE BELGIAN AND BRITISH MEMBERS OF THE RAF  
SEND A DONATION TO THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION, BELGIAN  
BRANCH, MAISON DES AILES, RUE MONTOYER, 1 - 1040 BRUXELLES.  
ACCOUNT N° IS CCP 000-0048204-92.**

## FORMATION OF THE BELGIAN BRANCH

Our Branch is one of the oldest in the Overseas Area. There does, however, seem to be, perhaps not surprisingly given the passage of time, some small confusion as to exactly when and how the Branch was formed. Below is a copy of a report in Newsletter Number 14 (March 1987), celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the Branch.

### ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION - BELGIAN BRANCH - 1947 -- 1987

1987 marks the 40th year of the formation of the Belgian Branch.

On the 10th December, 1946 Wing Commander Le Roy du Vivier D.F.C. wrote a letter suggesting the formation of a "Section Belge de la R.A.F." and invited all flyers and non-flyers who served in the R.A.F. to a meeting on Saturday the 14th December at 1500 hrs. at the Montgomery Club. rue aux Laines.

In 1947 the Branch was officially formed with W/Cdr. Le Roy du Vivier DFC as Chairman, Arthur Plowman Hon. Secretary and Andre de Limelette as Hon. Treasurer. The Administrators were Sidney Bailey and Jacques Gyssels.

On Saturday 24th May 1947 the first social event was organised, a Dance at U.F.A.C. 65 rue de la Regence, tickets 20 francs on sale at the door.

The Branch has survived for 40 years in good days and bad thanks to the Officers and Members who have dedicated so much of their time and enthusiasm to the RAF Association.

We can be proud of our Branch which does such splendid welfare work in Belgium for Belgian and ex-patriot former members of the RAF, supports the Sussexdown Home in England and contributes every year in Wings Week for the RAFA Headquarters and to the RAF Benevolent Fund. The social side provides a frequent get-together of old comrades not forgetting our WAAF sisters. The Branch has close connections with the Belgian Air Force and its old comrades association, the Escape Lines and many towns and villages who pay tribute annually to the RAF by holding ceremonies in their churches and Town Halls.

The Belgian Branch is in good health after 40 years and we are dedicated to keep it going for a long time yet.

A HAPPY 40th BIRTHDAY.

Excellent sentiments, which are just as relevant today after another 25 years as they were then.

However, on the next page is a copy of the formal Certificate presented to the Branch in 1996 to mark our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (as published in Newsletter 58 in Jun 1999) indicating that the Branch was formed in November 1946.

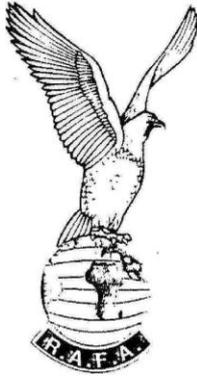
So, 1946 or 1947? Either way, we can proudly celebrate our 65<sup>th</sup> year and the continued upholding of the Royal Air Forces Association tenets of comradeship, welfare and support in Belgium: long may we continue to do so!

# THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION

REGISTERED UNDER THE CHARITIES ACT 1993  
REGISTERED NUMBER 226686

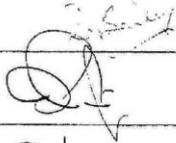
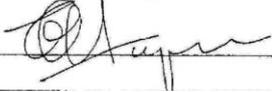
PATRON  
H M THE QUEEN

INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER



The President and the Members of Central Council  
acknowledge with grateful and sincere thanks the fifty  
years of continuous support by the Belgian Branch  
of The Royal Air Forces Association which was  
formed on 12th November 1946

Signed

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

Chairman  
of Council

Chairman  
of Executive Committee

Secretary

## BRANCH ADMINISTRATION

### NEWSLETTER

*To help us cut our printing and postal costs, the Newsletter is 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 Editor know.*

### MEMBERSHIP

As advised in Newsletter 106, in accordance with Central Council decisions, membership fees will be increased for the calendar year 2013. For Belgium, the Committee have agreed the following rates for both Ordinary and Associate Members: €25 for a 1 year subscription (is €22 currently), and €75 for a 4 year subscription (currently €60). Unless you are a Life Member these fees will become due on 1 Jan 2013. To help minimise administrative effort, please transfer funds to RAFA Belgian Branch account BE12-0000-0482-0492 (FOR MEMBERSHIP FEES) early in the New Year.

### WEB SITE

As mentioned in Newsletter 106, our planning for a Branch Website continues under the leadership of our Branch Webmaster. Following discussion with the RAFA Central HQ experts, we are envisaging site structure which resembles the RAFA main site in layout (i.e. the same look and feel as <http://www.rafa.org.uk>) but with our own menu tabs as follows:

**Home** - Latest news and info from Belgium.

**Who What Where** - essentially about us (the Committee) and the aims of RAFA and where located (meetings): links to RAFA Main Site and other Branches, and info on (links to) other Belgian Organisations (e.g. Comèt Line, Brussels RBL).

**Records** - Branch activities recent and past with associated photos and members' memoirs (includes Branch Newsletters, and AGM records).

**Committee** - a discrete and password protected area for welfare reports, list of members with contact details, Chairman's Report, Treasurer's Report, Secretary's Minutes, etc.

**Future Events** - a calendar of events and memorial services,

**Contact Us** - the usual mail page linked to a selected email address.

**Search** - usual search feature by typing in keyword.

Please contact the Webmaster if you have any suggestions as to what might, or might not, be included, and/or if you have comments on the user-friendliness of the main RAFA site.

## THOUGHTS ON COMRADESHIP

From all over Europe and the Commonwealth, out of all walks of life, they came and joined the Royal Air Forces. The common goal and fate was to serve their countries and to get freedom respected and human dignity maintained. It was not a boyish adventure that powered their commitment. Rendering service and being efficient to perform a common mission were the incentives: working together in close units in order to be of mutual support and provide performance. For many training months they had to go for their final task. It was impossible to think of mere individual input. It was teamwork of the finest kind. They had to think of and remember about events as 'one' got to assume. Gradually a group spirit grew and also responsibility taken for one another. They had been selected at random before; no matter of making personal choices or express own willingness. Gradually they grew into crews and units bonded by a sense of duty and real comradeship.

As wartime went on and missions took their toll, those crews were reshaped and completed by newcomers. But the same powerful spirit went on. No one could fall back onto the comfortable past of family and relatives. It was a daily survival of the team that was aimed for. Only that way they could perform a continuous commitment to bring the larger armed forces to a final victory. Their countries could rely on their relentless combat spirit and endless generosity for the common good. That's certainly the spirit Prime Minister Winston Churchill aimed for at the outbreak of hostilities with the terms: 'blood, toil, tears and sweat'.

Even years later in peacetime, that bond of comradeship remained firm and grew while the former airmen grew old themselves. It was not a mere sense of souvenirs that kept them together. Although most of them merged into civil activities, still that common sense of comradeship held on. That's exactly what RAFA is standing for and trying to keep alive about its members. No simple association of mutual interest but much more a real community of shared accomplished lifetimes, including now spouses and relatives of their beloved ones who passed away.

Keeping that spirit alive and being ready to stand by in tough moments of life is surely one of the key aims of our RAFA Branch.

Father Walter Peeters,  
RAFA Belgian Branch,  
Honorary Chaplain

## IN MEMORIAM

### Col Avi Henri Verbruggen,

Lived Ghent, Belgium: died July 2012 aged 89. Branch life member since 1981. An RAF volunteer in World War 2, trained as a Sergeant Navigator and was commissioned in 1946 before joining the Belgian Air Force where he was promoted Lt Colonel in 1962 and Reserve Colonel in 1975.



### Mr Guy Lebizay,

Lived Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, Brussels: died 18 June 2012 aged 89. Branch life member since 1962. Escaped from occupied Belgium in November 1941 and was imprisoned in France. Released May 1942 and reached England via Gibraltar in July 1942. Enrolled in Belgian Forces in the RAF in 1942, trained as a pilot (Spitfire) in Canada and posted to 349 (Belgium) Sqn in 1945. After the War, he completed a full flying career with SABENA.



## IN MEMORIAM

### Mr André (Andy) Leleu DFC,

Living in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, Bruxelles: died February 2012 aged 90. Branch life member since 1975. Escaped from occupied Belgium on 15 February 1941 (71 years to the day before his funeral) and managed to avoid arrest in France, making his way to England in June 1941 via Spain, Portugal and Gibraltar. Enrolled in Belgian Forces in the RAF in 1942 and after training in Canada he was commissioned as an Observer (navigator/bomb aimer) in August 1943.



Posted to 158 Sqn (Halifax) at RAF Lissett and flew on Bomber Command operations. On 11 August 1944 his aircraft was badly damaged whilst on a raid over Germany, putting all radio and navigation systems out of action. Despite this, Leleu's expertise in Astro-Navigation enable him to plot a course using a sextant, and the crew returned safely to base. He was awarded the DFC, the citation noting that he displayed '*gallantry and outstanding discipline, courage and determination*'.

On 12 September 1944, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of his 'tour' of 30 missions, his aircraft was hit by flak and exploded. Leleu was thrown clear and despite being unconscious, landed safely by parachute. He was the only survivor. He was captured and imprisoned in Stalag Luft 1. He was liberated by the Russians on 1 May 1945 and repatriated to his native Courtrai courtesy of the United States Air Force. He was discharged from the Air Force on 7 February 1946.

## IN MEMORIAM

### Mr Raoul Schreiden,



Living in Mexico: died 15 July 2012 aged 88. Branch life member since 1977. Escaped from occupied Belgium in February 1941, imprisoned in France. Following release, reached England via Pyrénées, Lisbon and Gibraltar and enrolled in Belgian Forces in the RAF. In 1943 trained as aircrew navigator and radio operator in Canada and UK (Oxfords and Mitchells) posted to 320 Sqn at RAF Dunsfold and flew on Bomber Command operations in 1944. Posted to Transport Command 525 Sqn (RAF Membury) in 1945. Joined Sabena in May 1946.

### Mr A Ingram,

Lived Ypres, Belgium : died April 2012. Branch life member since 1982.

### Mr Lucien-Francois Devadder,

Lived Jette, Bruxelles: died 23 April 2012. Branch life member since 1975.

*'In Memoriam' information and photographs courtesy of André Bar and Léon Rubin*

## REPORT ON BARRY HORTON MEMORIAL GOLF TOURNAMENT – 29 JUN 12

The major Branch fund-raising event of the year, the Barry Horton Memorial Golf Tournament, was held at Duisburg Military Golf Club on 29 June 2012. 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. There were over 80 participants and, thanks to their generosity, the event generated a net income for the Branch of over € 2500.



Rapt Attention during the Chairman's Speech

In his speech the Chairman particularly welcomed Jacques Creyf President DMGC and our Branch Co-President Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper and Lady Janet, and noted the best wishes from co-president, Sqn Leader Edward Hearn who was moving house and so could not participate. He also thanked Jacques Creyf and Nestor De Vos, as well as Patrick Vandewyngaert from the Belgian Military Sports Centre, for their indispensable support.

The golf event involved over 50 players, and the competition was tight, with some prizes being decided on count-back over the last 6 holes. This year for the first time, courtesy of the family of the late Tom and Ghislaine Hennessey, all the main prize-winners received special RAF Association Pewter Goblets in addition to prizes most generously provided by participants.

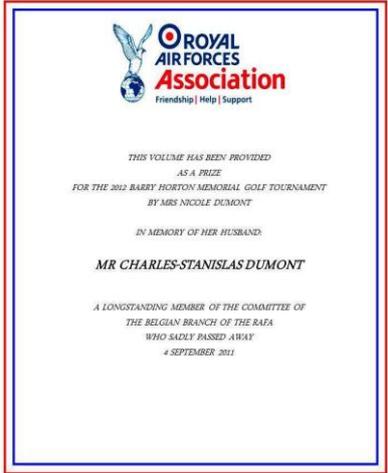


**Caroline Jonker,**  
winner of the  
Ladies Prize and  
the Barry Horton  
Trophy for 2012,  
receiving the  
Trophy from  
Brigitte Horton



**Ron Dobson**, winner of the Men's Prize receiving his RAFA Goblet and Champagne from Lady Jan Harper

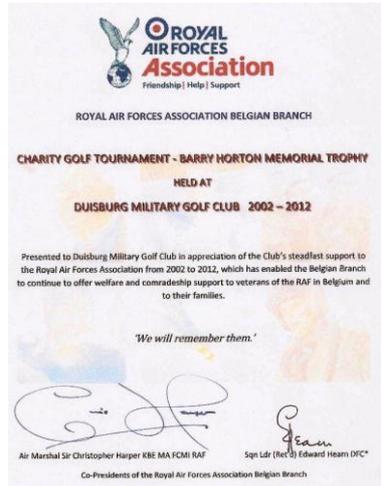
Dedication in 'History of the RAF' awarded to Peter Bedford as the highest placed RAF member



Other golf prizes were awarded to Carol Jones, Brigitte Horton (Ladies 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>), Ron Aston, Christophe Leyder (Men's 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>), David Humphreys, Arnaud Derycker (Nearest the Pin and Longest Drive): well done to all.



The event could not take place without the active support and involvement of the DMGC, and to mark the Club's steadfast support over 10 years, Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper presented a certificate of appreciation to the Club President Jacques Creyf.



The overall success of the day owed much to the BBQ and to the Tombola.

Chef David Ryder and expert supporter Bob Jenkins did a super job in catering for all tastes with the famed sausages and hamburgers supplemented by special mushrooms, peppers and halloumi, all done to perfection. Special thanks are also owed to those who provided the most marvellous salads and puddings which were exactly right for the day.

Thanks to the efforts of our 'Master of Ceremonies' Team of Peter Bedford and our past-Chairman Mike Connor, with most able support from Gill Ward and Hannah French, the Tombola was once again a great success contributing over € 500 to the total. Very many thanks to all those who participated and contributed the magnificent prizes.

## REPORTS ON OTHER PAST EVENTS

### **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 15 July 2012. 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 and colleagues at the event.

### **Interment of Major Charles de Hepcée - Return of a hero after 68 years**

On 24 July 2012, Belgian Air Force Major, Charles (Charley) de Hepcée was buried at Halloy, near Ciney, in a moving ceremony. Following the occupation of Belgium in 1940, he joined the Resistance and subsequently was commissioned in the Belgian Section of the RAF. Whilst on mission for the Allies in 1944 supporting escape activities on the Continent, he was captured and subsequently executed by the Gestapo in the Bois de la Reulle (Haute Garonne) France. For many years his daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren have been trying to find his burial place. They never gave up hope. Chance led the family to Castelmaurou, and its cemetery where, following numerous checks and the use of the latest DNA techniques, he was found to have been buried. Finally, he was brought back to Halloy, where he is now buried next to his wife. The ceremony was attended by the Representative of the King and the Chief of the Belgian Armed Forces. The RAF was represented by Wg Cdr Andy Gray and Warrant Officer Gary Warner: our Branch Standard was paraded by Jean-Pierre Blanckaert and a RAFA Poppy Wreath was laid by Brigitte Horton as our Branch representative. A fly past took place and two trumpeters played the Last Post. For further information and photographs please see the back page.

### **Tigelot Memorial at Jalhay**

The 61<sup>st</sup> Annual event organised by the society of the 'Memorial Canadien du Tigelot' in memory of the sacrifice of all Allied Airmen who lost their lives in the High Ardennes in the Second World War, was held on 19 August 2012. The religious service in Jalhay church and the wreath laying ceremony at the crash site of Halifax bomber MZ 829 were well attended by many old friends including relations of the Halifax crew, a strong contingent of serving Canadian Armed Forces personnel from Geilenkirchen and members of the Royal British Legion. The Chairman attended on behalf of the Branch. The event was completed by the normal excellent, and most convivial, memorial luncheon. For further details on the memorial and its background, please see Newsletter 103 or contact the Memorial President, Léon Boulet ([leon.boulet@skynet.be](mailto:leon.boulet@skynet.be)). Please also see the photograph on the back page.

# The Chronicle of a Passer By

By Edward Harty Elliot Hearn

*Editor's Note:*

*This 7<sup>th</sup> episode of our Branch Honorary Co-President's 'Chronicle' as transcribed by Gp Capt (Ret'd) Mike Connor, contains extracts from Part 2 Chapter 5 with the Author's observations of life in India at Royal Air Force Ranchi in late 1945.*

*Please see Newsletter 101 for the Contents List.*

## **PART TWO – 1940 -1946**

### **5. Ferment, Exhilaration and Anticipation in Ranchi, the Capital of the Bihar State**

With his bright blue eyes, fair curly hair, trimmed moustache and top button of his uniform jacket undone, O'Kelly unobtrusively, but definitely arrived at Ranchi to take up his post as Station Adjutant. As it happened, his arrival coincided with two impending important events affecting the affairs of this Royal Air Force Station.

The first was a visit from Subdas Chandra Bose. You will recall that it was he who was the Calcutta and Cambridge graduate that joined Mahatma Ghandi's Movement in 1920 and subsequently spent several periods of imprisonment in His Majesty's gaols during the two decades that followed his return to his native country. He fled from India in 1940 via Germany to form a volunteer army to fight alongside the Japanese against Britain. His planned arrival in Ranchi was sanctioned by the British and, in true democratic fashion, he was to be given a military escort, whisked out of the aerodrome and hurried back again with the same escort. It was feared that his audience and followers would return with him and invade the airfield, thus causing an upset in the otherwise tranquil existence of the base.

The second event, although of the two it was probably considered to be the most important, concerned the arrangements being made for a bumper Station dance in cooperation with the local British Medical Hospital. Situated on the other side of Ranchi, the hospital was staffed with sisters and nurses who, by their very presence, uplifted the lives of the airmen stationed on this important airfield. It was the Wing Commander who initiated this latter event and it was almost certain that it was planned for his own benefit because of his liking for one of the sisters. This relationship was forcibly limited to discreet telephone calls and meetings at official functions such as the opening of bazaars, sports events, cocktail parties and picnics, where the numbers prevented the Wingco's attentions from going further than the reluctant sister wished them to go.

Notwithstanding the Wingco's priorities, this event was looked forward to with great anticipation. Preparations were undertaken with an ardour which far outweighed the routine attention given to day by day affairs such as protecting the airfield from saboteurs, the flight schedules of the Indian Squadron and the coming and going of numerous service personnel. Such enthusiasm was understandable

because the men coming to the dance would outnumber the women by five to one, which introduced an element of healthy competition to the affair.

It should be mentioned that the Wingco was a regular, trained at Halton, who by brute force and determination came up through the ranks to his present senior status. His watches and clocks were always set ten minutes in advance of the true time as if he was perpetually worried about missing something. He was a big man in every sense of the word, but his feelings for Juliet, for that was her name, seemed to develop into a fever and intensity with which he hoped to catch up with all those advanced ten minutes in his life.

As for O'Kelly, the new Station Adjutant, his past was a mystery other than it was evident that somewhere along the line he did battle in a fighter squadron. One felt that he had left his mark wherever he had been because of his perpetual bonhomie. O'Kelly's arrival on the Station was the subject of the usual unspoken questions. Would he fit in? Would he cooperate in the sporting events? Pay his way in the bar? Take part in the fortnightly pie-dog shoot? Not only did he cope with his initiation but, as a personality, he quickly took a lead in the need for general pacific contentment. Apart from the undone top button, he was always impeccably dressed, respectful to his superiors (especially to the Wingco) and thoughtful to those under his own rank. He even survived the Sikh Squadron Commander's invitation to a hotly spiced curry supper, preceded by tumbler-filled neat whisky drinks in his Officers' Mess. This achievement was discreetly maintained by a three day absence during which he recovered his vocal chords!

Before too long, it was therefore natural that O'Kelly fitted into the routine of the Station and the social round which went with his role as the Station Adjutant. One of his first social engagements was to assist the Wingco at the official opening of a bazaar in the centre of town. For this he had the privilege of riding in the Wingco's green Standard car with the pennant flying. The opening ceremony took place in a flower-bedecked tent. The local dignitary suitably welcomed the representative of the Raj and the Wingco replied with his customary speech which took the form, but not the contents, of a lecture on armaments. Afterwards, there was the mixing of guests and introductions. The British Medical Hospital was represented by a Brigadier and a bevy of sisters, one of whom was Juliet.

That was how O'Kelly came to meet Juliet. The Wingco's introduction was formal and suitably replied to by O'Kelly. The reply was oblivious to the Wingco, his gaze being fixed on Juliet. She glanced at the Wingco with her customary demureness, but then the half-lidded eyes turned to O'Kelly and held him in a moment of concentrated attention.

Juliet was an Army hospital sister for the duration of the war, probably trained at Guy's. Service in the Forces was most certainly a temporary measure until the end of hostilities. She was of medium height, dark with brown eyes, beautifully proportioned, all of which fitted well into her uniform which she had to wear most of the time. In fact, the Wingco had never seen her out of uniform which added to his frustration. Juliet's further attraction was that she seemed to be near and remote at one and the same time. She lived and nursed in the British Medical Hospital in Ranchi.

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O'Kelly, the new Station Adjutant, had his quarters on the base, but the Wingco lived in a detached bungalow on the outskirts of the airfield. This was rather lonely for him and was probably why he spent most of his off-duty time at the bar of the Officers' Mess. Before O'Kelly's arrival, he had returned from the Maharaja's annual safari with the gift of a fully grown bear. He solemnly presented it to his officers with the request that it be suitably housed and fed. The only place available for housing the bear was the end room of the officers' quarters – a mud and thatched roof structure with a wooden pillared open passageway running the full length of one side. The advantage of this covered way was that the sun was prevented from entering into the rooms. Also it provided shelter for the daily bath tubs placed on the verandah. With the arrival of the bear, the disadvantage was that during its twice-daily exercises, it stopped at each pillar, hugged them and the accompanying bearer, causing the barrack to shake to its very foundations. This left the occupants in a state of extreme trepidation especially as the tremors took place at seven o'clock every morning and during the afternoon siesta time. Moreover, the bear's favourite diet was cheese and jam and these had to come from the meagre mess rations. O'Kelly was assigned a room in this billet.

After putting up with these unhealthy and unhappy experiences for some weeks (the smell was also becoming unbearable), O'Kelly was responsible for advising against a direct confrontation with the Wingco. It was decided to enter a formal complaint in the Mess book. The President of the Mess Committee instructed everyone to sign. At the ensuing Committee meeting, a full attendance of all the officers was recorded. The agenda items were discussed item by item until, at last, the subject of the bear came up for discussion.

It was suggested by an accommodating member that the hustling and threat to the stability of the building could be solved if a large pit were to be dug and the bear dropped into it. But the problem of the cheese and jam rations was insoluble and condemned by all present with the exception of the silent Wingco. He had listened to the arguments with increasing anger. Eventually, in final exasperation, he exploded: "Shoot it and I don't want to know who is to do it or when it is to be done." Several days passed and then, one silent dawn, one shot was heard, then another, followed by complete stillness. The air was hung in suspense at this sorry tragedy.

This incident happened only one week before the reinstatement of dining-in nights. The first dining-in night started off well although the customary wine had to be replaced with Australian beer. All the officers were present in their best khaki with the Wingco presiding. At the end of the last course everyone carried an air of composed satisfaction. The Wingco congratulated the Catering Officer and mildly asked him what they had been eating. A deep silence settled over the room and the scraping of the Catering Officer's chair could be clearly heard as he rose to reply. "Bear meat Sir", he said, abruptly sitting down whilst fixing his eyes on the empty plate in front of the Wingco.

The Wingco gave an audible gasp and covered his face with his napkin. He raised his eyes which, unfortunately and for no apparent reason, fell on O'Kelly, his new adjutant, as though it were he that must be responsible for the outrage. O'Kelly seemed to be rather bemused by it all and his true and clear innocence flowed forth in his vacant half smile return stare. In desperation, the Wingco stood up and stormed out of the room leaving his crumpled napkin on the floor, whilst his officers were still rising to their feet.

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Subdas Chandra Bose duly arrived in a Royal Air Force aircraft promptly at eleven o'clock and, as previously arranged, was escorted by military outriders out of the airfield and into the centre of Ranchi where he was greeted by an enthusiastic and tumultuous crowd gathered to hear his campaign speech on behalf of the Indian National Congress. To arm height cheering, he began his speech fully aware of the limited time made available to him. It developed into a hurried and vicious harangue against the British Raj and the Imperial Rule covering the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. His true supporters applauded vigorously, but there were many silent faces amongst the audience. Immediately after his discourse, he descended from the garlanded dais to be surrounded once again by his military escort and was whisked away at lightning speed to the airfield. His aircraft, with him safely inside, took off for Calcutta.

That so contentious a visit could pass off with only minor incidents was a cause of great relief and some satisfaction to the organisers and executants, who dismantled their arms, retired to their messes and indulged in a minor celebration by supping the usual Efferman's gin and Australian beer. The smoothness of that operation also helped pave the way for increased motivation and anticipation in the preparations for the dance.

The dance was to take place in neutral territory between the Army and the Air Force. Audrey House was the chosen Victorian building, ideal for such an occasion, being situated in the centre of Ranchi. It comprised several large reception areas including a grand banqueting hall which would be used for the dance.

On the Friday evening, the festooning of the hall had already commenced with flowers hanging in chains between the pillars and spot lights cleverly hidden in the upper reaches and balconies. The curtains to the stage on which the Station Band would play had been to the dhobi wallahs and freshly ironed. The floor had been polished and powdered, leaving the parquet with a too smooth finish which might trouble some over exuberant trotters. By the Saturday morning this part of the operation was all set and the glamour of the hall rivalled any western capital's 'Palais de Danse'.

The afternoon was spent in laying out the buffet on tables stretching down the whole of one side of the hall. Crockery, cutlery and glasses, the cold buffet with cheese cakes, sausages, spiced chicken curry, mutton slices, cold meat savouries, sauces, spices, chapaties, oranges, mangoes, bananas and confitures, all adding to the splendid colour of the vast room. The bar covered the same length on the other side of the hall and was stocked with Efferman's Indian gin, whisky, Australian beer, soft drinks and facilities for making tea and coffee. Separate tables were placed all around the dance floor, each set for ten persons, seventy in all. Each one was covered with a white linen cloth and brightened with vases of flowers and Royal Air Force roundel flags.

The Wingco spent the afternoon in delightful and anxious anticipation of events to come – the first opportunity to take his beloved Juliet in his arms and waltz with her around the dance floor to the admiring and jealous scrutiny of the tumultuous gathering.

Juliet had finished nursing the sick for the day and was washing her hair in her quarters at the hospital. A servant moved silently in the background, arranging the pure silk evening dress and other necessities for the approaching festivities.

O’Kelly slept. His afternoon siesta was sacrosanct.

Tickets for the dance were five rupees per head, half to be torn off at the entrance and the other half retained for nipping out and back during the course of the evening. The bar would open at 1915 and dancing would commence at 2000 hours. All the sisters and nurses from the British Military Hospital had been invited and most were delighted to accept the invitations. By obligation, a few senior Army officers also received invitations and they would most certainly come.

At 1900 hours by his watch, 1850 hours real time, the Wingco appeared on the scene. The advance notice given to him by his timepiece enabled him to examine the preparations for the grand event – the dais for the Band, the lighting, the decorated tables, the bar and buffet and the garlanded pillars. It also gave him time to choose a discreet table in a corner of the dance floor, one which was dimly lit and fairly hidden from any prying eyes. Having chosen his table and after downing a quick gin and tonic, he found himself at the entrance to Audrey House ready to receive the expected crowd of joyful guests.

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Those coming to the dance arrived by foot, jeep, rickshaw, car and bus. The first comers were at the entrance promptly at 1915. The Wingco was there to receive the first guests. He greeted all with the same courtesy – he had always had a certain sympathy with the rank and file and they received individual welcomes. Despite there being hundreds on the camp, he knew most by name and, in some cases, could assess their attributes and foibles better than they themselves could.

By 1930, the bar was crowded and the conversation was animated as the airmen searched for their first drink. Shortly afterwards, the Hospital party arrived escorted by the doctors and administrative staff. Now the Wingco’s eyes were well open searching for Juliet whilst shaking hands with the new arrivals prior to handing them over for introductions to the assembly at the bar.

From his six feet two inches of height, he was able to scan the oncoming throng – and there she was, resplendent and glowing in her light green uncovered shoulder evening dress, but on whose arm was she clinging? O’Kelly! O’Kelly was escorting her! How could this happen? Calamity, calamity!

As Juliet and O’Kelly approached, the Wingco found himself in a state of rigid attention, face frozen to a mask, lips clamped together, hands formed into fists as for the Last Post. He unclenched his right fist and took Juliet’s hand, silent and forlorn. He then turned to O’Kelly. O’Kelly still bore his half smile, his gaze urbanely meeting that of his superior officer:

*“Good evening Sir” he said, “Juliet asked me to pick her up at the hospital to join you at the dance.”*

*“To join me at the dance?”* It was almost a gasp, but the Wingco quickly recovered when he realised the joyful interpretation of those words. He held out both hands to Juliet whilst turning again to O’Kelly:

*“Thank you O’Kelly. You will, of course, join us at my table. Look after Juliet a minute while I go and get you both an aperitif.”*

The happy Wingco returned from the bar with the drinks as the Band began to play and found himself weaving amongst the throng making for the dance floor. He reached his table and O’Kelly helped him to sort out the glasses. The Wingco looked adoringly at Juliet who delicately held the stem of her glass. Eyes upturned, she returned his attentions, at the same time keeping O’Kelly in view.

*“To you Juliet”* said the Wingco, *“and to you O’Kelly – here’s to a happy evening for us all!”*

O’Kelly, glass raised to his lips (and was there a shade of a wink?) said *“Bonne Santé to the winners and losers!”* But the reply was lost in the noise of the orchestra.

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Then, at the edge of the crowded throng, the Wingco spotted the red embellishments on the General’s uniform. The General was the most important and favoured guest because it was he, after all, who had made it possible for his Hospital’s sisters and nurses to join the evening’s entertainment. After making hurried apologies to his neighbours at the table, the Wingco rose to greet the General, then steered him to the reserved seat to the left of Juliet. Before sitting down, the General, a doctor dressed in a soldier’s uniform, bent down and kissed Juliet’s offered hand, a gesture noted by the unworldly Wingco for use on future occasions.

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Meanwhile, the evening was gaining momentum. The Blue Squadron Dance Band was warming to the occasion with the help of gratuitously supplied strong Australian beer. The dance floor was alive with joyously moving couples. Those not on the dance floor were in the long queues at the bar or buffet, or biding their time at the gaily decorated tables. Mess orderlies in coloured waist-banded white linen tunics and silk scarf turbans mixed discreetly at the fringe of the convivial crowd, seemingly happy to take part in the joy of others.

In turn, Juliet danced elegantly with the General, primly with the Wingco, then easily with O’Kelly. Nestling in O’Kelly’s arms, she whispered,

*“Have you spoken to the Wing Commander? You keep promising to do so and it is surely unfair not to warn him.”*

*“Dear Juliet”,* he murmured in reply, *“You know the problem. I am trying to choose the most convenient time. He is very sensitive especially in our rapport with each other. The bear incident did not help, though it was none of my doing. Truth is, I have grown rather fond of the old man but don’t worry, leave it to O’Kelly!”* and he swung her around in the midst of the whirling dancers.

At their table, the General was explaining to the Wingco the reason for his lateness in arrival due to an emergency in the hospital. Quietly spoken and courteous, the Wingco found himself at ease with this Army man despite his prejudice towards his own service. The two were deep in animated conversation when Juliet and O’Kelly rejoined them. They both stood up and handled Juliet’s chair, leaving O’Kelly to take his place on the opposite side.

This interlude gave the General the opportunity to announce that he was going to the bar and buffet to revitalise the company at the table. Juliet promptly volunteered to help. They both departed, leaving the Wingco and O’Kelly looking at each other across the table. O’Kelly got up from his seat and crossed over to sit by the Wingco. Hesitatingly, he breached the silence:

*“I have something I must say to you, Sir.”*

The Wingco looked at him with a reproachful stare, the former mistrust welling up inside him again.

*“Yes O’Kelly, what is it?” “Well Sir, it’s like this: there is something I think you should know.”*

The frown appearing on the Wingco’s face gave away his most innermost misgivings. The doubts racing across his mind were intermingled with flashes of Juliet, magnificent in her silk evening dress as she waltzed across the dance floor. He remained silent – waiting. Eventually, O’Kelly had the courage to speak:

*“What I wanted to say Sir is rather confidential as it still has not been made public.”*

*“Well, O’Kelly – get on with it.”*

*“Wing Commander, it concerns Juliet.” “Juliet? What about Juliet?” “What I wanted you to know Sir, was that Juliet and the General are engaged to be married and are flying to Calcutta next week to tie, as they say, the knot.”*

He glanced covertly at the Wingco and saw that his Commander’s face was now hidden by a hand which covered his forehead, eyes and the upper part of his face. The pool of silence in the middle of the dancing and noisy crowd was embarrassing to the usually tranquil O’Kelly. He felt the urge to keep on talking:

*“You know Sir, I thought I had a chance there, but now, funnily enough, I’ve come to terms with the inevitable”.*

He turned towards the Band to escape the awkwardness of the situation, where the Blue Squadron Dance Band singer was singing the current favourite, “A kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh ....” and was startled by the sudden question –

*“O’Kelly, what time is it?”*

*“Er – twenty five minutes to eleven, Sir.”*

On hearing an almost inaudible sigh, O’Kelly glanced towards the Wingco, who was adjusting the minute hand on his watch. Looking up, the Wingco said:

*“O’Kelly, unlike you, I only have ten minutes to accept this reality.”*

He continued, softly murmuring,

*“Not to worry – I will cope.”*

*To be Continued*

## FUTURE EVENTS CALENDAR

Sunday 16 Sep 12 at 11:00 – Battle of Britain Service at St Boniface Church, JHQ Rheindahlen, Germany, followed by Buffet Lunch at Cassells House. The JHQ is closing shortly and hence this will be the last such event in Germany. The Chairman will participate: please contact him if you would like revive old memories of the RAF in Germany.

Saturday 29 Sep 12 – inauguration of 'Wings of Memory' memorial at Kakebeke 9570 Lierde to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the loss of RAF 57 Sqn Lancaster W4234 'DX-P'. Programme: 12:30 meet at Lierde Town Hall (Nieuwstraat 21), 13:30 bus to memorial, 14:00 -15:00 memorial speeches, wreath-laying, exhortation, fly-past, 15:00 return to Town Hall, 15:30 remembrance by 'Wings of Memory' team and Representatives, 16:30 Reception. <http://www.wingsofmemory.be>. Those wishing to participate are invited to contact the Branch Secretary or the event organiser Dirk De Quick (0495/15 01 66, [dirk@wingsofmemory.be](mailto:dirk@wingsofmemory.be)).

10 Oct 12 – Harvest Lunch at Les Brasseries Rustiques in Evere. The lunch will be hosted by the British Charitable Fund, the Royal British Legion and 'The Wednesday Club'. RAFA members are invited to join. If you wish to participate, please contact Deborah Whittingham before the end of September.

Saturday 13 Oct 12 - Belgian Air Force Remembrance Service at the Air Force memorial at the Cinquantenaire, Brussels.

12-14 Oct 12 – European Area RAFA Conference at Amsterdam, Netherlands. The Chairman will attend: others members who would like to join this policy-making event which also does much to foster the Association's comradeship aims, should contact the Chairman as soon as possible. It should be noted that although central funds only reimburse some of the costs of sending one delegate to Conference, it is Branch committee policy that available funds will be shared equally amongst all Branch attendees.

Saturday and Sunday 20/21 Oct 12 : Comète Line Annual Reunion in Brussels. Saturday, visit to the surroundings of Ypres in the "Flanders Fields", Belgian and Commonwealth cemeteries. Sunday, Church service and Comète Line/RAF memorial in the Koekelberg Basilica, followed by Lunch at the Maison des Ailes.

Thursday 1 Nov 12 - Commemoration at the Belgian and RAF Memorials at the Belgian Cemetery at Evere.

Wednesday 7 Nov 12 - Veterans Reception (18:00 – 20:00) hosted by the British Ambassador to Belgium, Jonathan Brenton. Entrance will be on presentation of invitation only. If you would like to attend, please contact the Branch Secretary.

Sunday 11 Nov 12 - Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday: 12:00 hrs at Holy Trinity, Brussels.

**Monday 10 Dec 12 [NB date change] - 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 (see page 2) before 3 December 2012 if you wish to attend.**

## MEMORIALS



RAFA Belgian Branch  
Standard Bearer Jean-  
Pierre Blanckaert at  
Cenotaph Parade



61st Anniversary of  
the Tigelot  
Memorial to Halifax  
MZ 829

Interment of Major  
Charles de Hepcée in the  
family vault after 68 years,  
honoured by RAF and  
RAFA representatives

24 July 2012



Principal mourners,  
the daughters and family  
of Major Charles de Hepcée

*Newsletter Printed by Joh Enschedé- Van Muysewinkel*