

BELGIAN BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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RAFA Belgian Branch Account
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NEWSLETTER NO 114

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This Newsletter can only provide a brief snap-shot of events in the RAFA Belgian Branch.
For further details and to keep up to date with Branch activities, please consult the
Branch website: <http://rafabelgianbranch.yolasite.com/>



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 CCMI RAF

Sqn Ldr (Ret'd) E Hearn DFC*

Vice-President: Gp Capt (Ret'd) R J Whittingham FRAeS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS – JUNE 2014

CHAIRMAN	Wg Cdr Ross McKenzie
VICE-CHAIR	Wg Cdr Rob Smeaton
HONORARY CHAPLAIN	Father Walter Peeters
SECRETARY	Flt Lt Vikki Milne
TREASURER	David Trembaczowski-Ryder (Wg Cdr Ret'd)
HONORARY WELFARE OFFICER (HWO)	Mrs Ghislaine Walkden
DEPUTY HWO	Mrs Deborah Whittingham
DEPUTY HWO (DESIGNATE)	Mr. Michel de Norman et d'Audenhove
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Mrs Brigitte Horton
BRANCH WEBMASTER	Rob Jenkins (Wg Cdr Ret'd)
COMMITTEE MEMBER	WO Gary Warner
SHAPE RAFA LIAISON OFFICER (RAFALO)	Sgt Richie Atha
SHAPE RAFALO (DESIGNATE)	Flight Sergeant Mark Coates
DEPUTY SECRETARY	Sgt Mark Lawson

For a quick answer to any query, please contact via email rafa.belgianbranch@gmail.com or to the Secretary on 0032 (0) 707.5470, NOT via the Post Box at Rue Montoyer

Dear Friends,

NEW CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

It is with a great deal of pleasure and pride that I take on the duty as your Chairman RAFA Belgian Branch. For our members who I have yet to meet, I very much look forward to meeting with you in due course. Unique in the overseas RAFA branches, I am a serving RAF officer, with connections across NATO, EU and Eurocontrol, that I intend to put to good use for RAFA in the coming years! I have Belgian family and live a short sprint north in Antwerp. Therefore dependent on my performance, I hope to be able to support you and our vibrant Ctte for the long haul!

I am similarly delighted to introduce Wg Cdr Rob Smeaton as vice-chair, Flt Lt Vikki Milne as secretary, Michel de Norman as one of our newest members and an early volunteer, thank you, for deputy welfare officer, and finally our new RAFALO Flt Sgt Mark Coates, who will hold the flag down at SHAPE for us. We are looking to bolster the Ctte with a 2-3 new names in the Summer rotation, to achieve full strength.

I would like to share my thoughts for my 'tour' as Chairman, and just to give you, our members, and idea of what your Ctte will be doing on your behalf. Primarily I wish to maintain focus on our core Welfare activities, and the 3 pillars of Friendship | Help | Support that underpin this. I wish to encourage a younger generation to get involved through more family orientated activities and to expose the vast amount of work done by RAFA to a larger audience - we have our story to tell. Work is therefore underway to create a simple strategy concentrating on the following areas:

1. The Why: **Welfare**. (Finance, provision, view to significantly expanding formal welfare activities)
2. The What: **Outreach activities**. (Newsletter, Membership, PR, Commemorative attendance, etc.)
3. The How: **Ctte structure and processes**. (Aim to simplify processes, evolve our website to better support our membership, central planning and admin, and re-focus Ctte meetings).

I have inherited a very busy and very successful Ctte. I wish to build on this success.

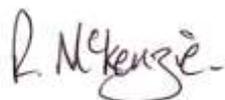
Talking of success, for those of you not yet aware, congratulations are in order to Dick for his election to RAFA Central Council, at the recent RAFA Annual Conference, Blackpool this May (see article in this edition). Poacher turned gamekeeper, we at least now have an inside man in the Central Council!

A busy quarter, that regrettably saw the loss of our dear Bobby Laumans (obituary in this edition), he will be sorely missed by all of us. You will find articles in this edition highlighting commemorative ceremonies at the Air Forces Chapel National Basilica Brussels, a ceremony at Rebecq and a report on the RAFA National Overseas Area and Annual Conferences. We have a particularly busy season of commemorative ceremonies (with many being 70th anniversaries), so volunteers to attend would be particularly welcome as we wish to spread the commitment across the Ctte and RAFA membership.

Back to (imminent) success, with our primary annual fundraising Golf match approaching rapidly, please register for the Barry Horton Memorial Golf Tournament (Friday 11 July), as listed on the back page.

As a sign off, a huge thank you to Dick & Deborah Whittingham for their dedication and hard work over the previous 5+ years chairing and serving our Committee. I know you will all wish them both the very best with their plans for the future.

Yours sincerely,



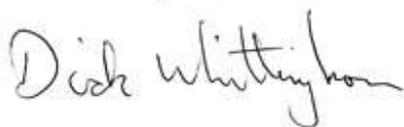
THOUGHTS FROM THE PAST CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends,

Since this is the last Newsletter where I will act as Editor, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my best wishes for the future to all Branch members and friends. It has been a real privilege and pleasure to be able to support the Branch over the last few years and to experience something of the very special nature of the close relationship between Belgium and the Royal Air Force. I am very happy that we have been able to strengthen and broaden that relationship and I am especially pleased to see that the Air Force Chapel in the Basilica is now providing a growing focus for the friendship between like-minded people that is at the very core of the Royal Air Forces Association. You will already see the important developments being made by Ross and the new Committee – you are in very good hands!

Having been in Belgium for so long, Deborah and I will not sever our links with the Branch: we will retain our Branch membership and will still provide support as best we can – United Kingdom is not that far away. As noted elsewhere in this Newsletter, somewhat to my surprise, I find myself elected as a member of the RAFA Central Council. It will certainly be a challenge to attempt to support most effectively the leadership and governance of the Association as a whole, but I am confident that the lessons learned in the Belgian Branch will provide a good basis for my endeavours. Please feel free to make contact if there are issues which you believe should be addressed.

All the very best,





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**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BELGIAN BRANCH OF THE
 ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION
 NATO STAFF CENTRE 18TH MARCH 2014**

<p>Present: Gp Capt (Ret'd) R Whittingham Wg Cdr (Ret'd) D Trembaczowski-Ryder Mrs G Walkden Mrs D Whittingham Mrs B Horton Father W Peeters Sgt R Atha Gp Capt (Ret'd) P Bedford Mrs N Bedford Flt Sgt M Coates Mr M de Norman et d'Audenhove Ms A Dumon Mr R Laumans Cpl M Ridsdale Mr L Rubin</p>	<p>Chairman Honorary Treasurer Honorary Welfare Officer (HWO) Assistant HWO (AHWO) Membership Secretary Honorary Chaplain SHAPE RAFA Liaison Officer (RAFALO)</p>
<p>Apologies: Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper Sqn Ldr (Ret'd) E Hearn H.E. Jonathan Brenton Wg Cdr R McKenzie Wg Cdr (Ret'd) R Jenkins Flt Lt A Walker Sgt M Lawson Mr J-P Blanckaert Gp Capt D Johnston Flt Lt V Milne Wg Cdr R Smeaton WO G Warner</p>	<p>Honorary Co-President Honorary Co-President Honorary Patron Branch Vice-Chair Branch Webmaster Secretary Deputy Secretary Branch Standard Bearer</p>

ITEM 1 - DEDICATION

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly those who were attending their first AGM. He noted that NATO was hard at work and that the Honorary Co-President Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper and his ADC, Belgian Secretary Flt Lt Arlene Walker, as well as her replacement Flt Lt Vikki Milne, plus our Vice-Chair Wg Cdr Ross McKenzie and WO Gary Warner were all away on Duty. He offered condolences to Sgt Mark Lawson who was unable to attend due to a recent family bereavement. He also passed on the very best regards of the AGM to Honorary Co-President Sqn Ldr Edward Hearn who was well but unable to join the meeting.

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, the meeting stood as the Honorary Chaplain Father Peeters delivered the Dedication (In Friendship and in service one to another, we are pledged to keep alive the memory of those of all Nations who died in the Royal Air Force and in the Air Forces of the Commonwealth. In their name we give ourselves to this noble cause. Proudly and thankfully we will remember them.), and remembered those members of the RAFA Belgian Branch who had passed away since the previous AGM: Lieutenant Colonel Bobby Bladt, Jean-Pierre Cornet, Brigadier General Lucien De Mey, Andrée de Norman, Lieutenant General Albert Debeche Lieutenant General Baron Mike Donnet, Jean Engelborghs, Joan Giles, René-Jean Gossette, Mary Laden, Reverend Charles MacNeil, André Procureur, Colonel Gustave Rens, Rayky Rubin.

ITEM 2 – MINUTES OF THE 2013 AGM

3. The Chairman advised that no comments had been received on the minutes of the last AGM held on 5 Mar 13, and the Chairman sought AGM approval of the minutes as published in Newsletter 110.

4. The minutes of the AGM held at the NATO Staff Centre on 5 Mar 13, were approved.

Proposed by Sgt R Atha and **seconded** by Father W Peeters.

Carried Unanimously

ITEM 3 – CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

5. In his Address, (see Enclosure 1 for the full text), the Chairman noted that the AGM has 3 roles: to agree the Committee for 2014, to provide a stock-take of the Branch for the past year, and to provide the Committee with guidance for the future. He highlighted that although he was standing down after 5 years as Chairman, the proposals for discussion under Item 4 were for a full committee with a nice balance between serving military, and old and new civilians. In conclusion he paid special tribute to all committee members and the other regular Branch supporters, in particular Standard Bearer Jean-Pierre Blanckaert, noting that it was their hard work and willingness to support that had really made a difference to many Branch members.

ITEM 4 – ELECTION / RE-ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

6. **Introduction.** The Chairman noted the revised proposals (Enclosure 2) for the Election of Officers of the Branch and members of the Committee as posted on the Branch Website. Following a proposal from the Chairman, the AGM agreed to conduct the elections of Wg Cdr McKenzie, Wg Cdr Smeaton, Wg Cdr (Ret'd) Jenkins, Flt Lt Milne, WO Warner and Sgt Lawson 'in absentia'.

7. **Officers not requiring Election.** The Chairman noted that as Officers of the Branch, Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper, Sqn Ldr (Ret'd) E Hearn and Father W Peeters did not require election. He warmly thanked them for the time and energy they gave in supporting Branch activity.

8. Election of Prospective new Committee Members.

8.1. The Chairman introduced Wg Cdr Ross McKenzie as Chairman, noting in particular that he had just been reposted to Brussels and that with a Belgian wife, he expected to have a long-term future in the area.

Proposed by Gp Capt (Ret'd) R Whittingham and **seconded** by Wg Cdr (Ret'd) D

Trembaczowski-Ryder.

Carried Unanimously

8.2. The Chairman introduced Wg Cdr Rob Smeaton, Mr Michel de Norman et d'Audenhove, Warrant Officer Gary Warner, Flt Sgt Mark Coates and Flt Lt Victoria (Vikki) Milne, and sought AGM approval for their election as Branch officials as follows:

- a. Wg Cdr J P R Smeaton as Vice-Chair
- b. Mr M de Norman et d'Audenhove as Committee Member
- c. Warrant Officer G Warner as Committee Member
- d. Flt Sgt M Coates as RAFA Liaison Officer (RAFALO) SHAPE (Designate)
- e. Flt Lt V Milne as Secretary

Proposed by Mrs G Walkden and **seconded** by Mrs B Horton.

Carried Unanimously.

9. **Re-election of Existing Committee Members.** The Chairman sought AGM approval, en masse for the following Committee members seeking re-election:

- a. Wg Cdr (Ret'd) D Trembaczowski-Ryder (Honorary Treasurer)
- b. Mrs G Walkden – de Coninck (Honorary Welfare Officer (HWO))
- c. Mrs B Horton - Leblanc (Membership Secretary)
- d. Mrs D Whittingham (Assistant HWO)
- e. Wg Cdr (Ret'd) R Jenkins (Branch Webmaster)
- f. Sgt R Atha (RAFALO SHAPE)
- g. Sgt M Lawson (Deputy Secretary)

Proposed by Father W Peeters and **seconded** by Gp Capt (Ret'd) P Bedford.

Carried Unanimously.

10. Resignations from the Committee.

10.1. The AGM formally noted the resignation from the Committee of the previous Chairman Gp Capt (Ret'd) R J Whittingham, the Vice-Chair Wg Cdr G Ward and the Secretary Flt Lt A Walker, and expressed thanks for their most valuable support.

10.2. The AGM also noted that:

- a. Sgt R Atha would be replaced as RAFALO SHAPE by Flt Sgt M Coates during the year.
- b. Mrs D Whittingham may return to UK during the year and hence that a new Assistant HWO may need to be recruited.
- c. At the request of Wg Cdr (Ret'd) D Trembaczowski-Ryder due to increased pressure of work in his primary job, the Committee is seeking a replacement Honorary Treasurer: Wg Cdr (Ret'd) D Trembaczowski-Ryder has most kindly agreed to remain on the committee as Assistant to the new Treasurer.

11. **Election of Vice-President.** Since he had a personal interest in the Agenda Item, the Chairman handed-over the Chair to the Dean of the Committee Mrs G Walkden. The Dean advised the AGM that in recognition of his fine work with the Branch over the past 8 years as Vice-Chair and Chairman, the Committee proposed that Gp Capt (Ret'd) R J Whittingham be elected as a Vice-President of the Branch in accordance with RAFA Branch Regulation 9. The Dean sought AGM approval of the Committee proposal.

Proposed by Mrs G Walkden and **seconded** by Father W Peeters.

Carried Unanimously.

ITEM 5 – TREASURER’S REPORT / APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS 2013

12. Following an invitation from the Chairman, Wg Cdr (Ret’d) D Trembaczowski-Ryder presented his Treasurer’s Report and the 2013 accounts as circulated in Newsletter 113. He noted that despite the additional expense of the Anglo-Belgian Remembrance Service in September, the overall Net Asset Surplus had been reduced by only some 2,800 Euros which was nicely inside the 3,000 Euro AGM 2013 budget guideline. He also noted that the transfer of accounts from BPost to BNP Paribas Fortis had been satisfactorily completed and this had greatly improved the ease and transparency of Branch accounting.

13. The Chairman noted the excellent and accurate job the Treasurer had done, and sought the approval of the AGM for the 2013 Accounts as circulated in Newsletter 113 (copy at Enclosure 3).

Proposed by Father W Peeters and **seconded** by Sgt R Atha.

Carried Unanimously.

14. On behalf of the AGM, the Chairman expressed his sincere thanks to Wg Cdr (Ret’d) Trembaczowski-Ryder for all his good, careful work not only to keep the Branch on an even financial keel but also to allow the accounts to be administered with much more clarity and simplicity than was previously the case.

15. The Chairman also sought, as required under Belgian ASBL legislation, the agreement of the AGM that the Committee members had satisfactorily discharged their administrative duties with respect to the accounts.

Proposed by Gp Capt (Ret’d) P Bedford and **seconded** by Cpl M Ridsdale.

Carried Unanimously.

ITEM 6 – WELFARE REPORT 2013 AND PROPOSALS FOR 2014

16. In the Welfare Report (see Enclosure 4), Mrs G Walkden noted with sadness the loss of many dear friends of the Branch in the past year and highlighted that Welfare activity had continued at a high level, but that there were currently no Branch members who need RAFBF support and that there were no anticipated additional welfare funding requirements for 2014. The Chairman invited the AGM to endorse the report.

Proposed by Flt Sgt M Coates and **seconded** by Mr R Laumans.

Carried Unanimously.

17. On behalf of the AGM, the Chairman thanked Mrs Walkden and Mrs Whittingham for their comprehensive report and for the dedication to the Branch and its welfare activity displayed by the welfare team, highlighting especially the tenacity and compassion which is required to get the support our members need from the RAF Benevolent Fund and from the Belgian Care System. He appealed to all members to be alert to the needs of other Branch members and to inform the Welfare Team as appropriate.

ITEM 7 – BUDGET 2014

18. The Honorary Treasurer presented his proposed budget for 2014 (as circulated in Newsletter 113), which reflected the committee view that in the light of the 2013 Branch resurgence, it would be prudent to cater for a longer life for the Branch than had been assumed in recent AGMs and that the draw-down of Branch assets should be halved for 2014: 1500 Euros vice 3000 Euros. In response to a question from Gp Capt (Ret'd) P Bedford, the Honorary Treasurer advised that the 'Friendship' expense line was intended to support social event costs where all Branch members were entitled to participate.

19. The Chairman thanked the Treasurer and sought AGM approval for the 2014 budget as at Enclosure 5 to form the basis for Committee budget planning.

Proposed by Mrs B Horton and **seconded** by Sgt R Atha.

Carried Unanimously.

ITEM 8 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

ITEM 8.1 – ELECTED MEMBERS OF RAFA CENTRAL COUNCIL

20. Since he had a personal interest in the Agenda Item, the Chairman handed-over the Chair to the Dean of the Committee Mrs G Walkden. The Dean noted that, as advised in Newsletter 113, all RAFA Branches would be invited to submit a postal vote to elect the 8 members of the 2014 RAFA Central Council. Candidates as identified in the pamphlet circulated with the hard copy version of the January 2014 AIRMAIL included the Belgian Branch Chairman, and the Committee propose that the Belgian Branch should cast its vote for the Chairman. Following supportive remarks from the floor, the Dean sought AGM endorsement of the Committee proposal.

Proposed by Wg Cdr (Ret'd) Trembaczowski-Ryder and **seconded** by Mr L Rubin.

Carried Unanimously.

ITEM 9 – CLOSING REMARKS

21. The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and continued support, and closed the meeting.

28 March 2014

Enclosures:

1. Chairman's Address
2. Election of Branch Officers and Committee Members – Revised Proposals
3. Treasurer's Statement of Accounts 2013 (See Newsletter 113 pages 6 to 9)
4. Welfare Report
5. Branch Budget for 2014 (See Newsletter 113 page 10)

REPORTS ON PAST EVENTS

Anglo-Belgian Dedication and Remembrance at the Air Force Chapel in the National Basilica, Koekelberg, 29 April 2014.

An Anglo-Belgian service of Dedication and Remembrance, jointly sponsored by the Belgian Air Component and the Belgian Branch of the RAFA was held in the Air Force Chapel in the National Basilica, Koekelberg on 29th April 2014. During the service the Shields of 12 additional RAF Squadrons on which Belgians served in World War 2 were dedicated and blessed.



Invited guests included the Belgian Chief of Defence General Van Caelenberge and Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper RAFA Belgian Branch Co-President. During the [event on 28th September 2013](#) to mark the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of the Air Force Chapel, General Van Caelenberge noted that not all RAF Squadrons on which Belgians had served in the War were identified by the presence of their Squadron Shields.

Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper and General Van Caelenberge

Further research identified that over 700 Belgian personnel escaped to the United Kingdom to serve as aircrew in the RAF on a total of 141 Squadrons. To ensure that all those Squadrons on which 5 or more Belgians served are commemorated in the Chapel, the Shields of 24, 32, 91, 123, 124, 141, 143, 147, 171, 236, 272, and 525 Sqns were mounted in the Chapel during the service.



The Service began with resounding 'air force' music provided by the Royal Orchestra of the Belgian Air Force under their conductor Captain Cilissen, and the march-on of the Belgian Branch and Comet Line Standards to the strains of the RAF March.

The Branch Honorary Chaplain Father Peeters gave the RAFA Dedication and the Reverend (Wg Cdr) Jones RAF Padre SHAPE, opened the Service with a Prayer, followed by a Bible Reading by Warrant Officer Warner.



The Chairman Wg Cdr Ross McKenzie, introduced the event and unveiled a new [tri-lingual plaque](#) explaining the role of the Air Force Chapel and linked to the www.theairforcechapel.be website. The Vice-Chair Wg Cdr Smeaton provided [information on each of the Squadrons](#) as the Shields were mounted on the Chapel wall by officers of the Belgian Air Component, by members of the Committee and, in the case of 32 (The Royal) Squadron, by a member of the Squadron. When all Shields were in place, they and the Plaque were blessed by Reverend Jones.

Wreaths were laid on behalf of the RAF (Wg Cdr McKenzie), the Belgian Air Component (General Major Vansina) and RAFA (Gp Capt Whittingham Ret'd). The Act of Remembrance was led by RAF veteran and Branch Member Mr Rubin who gave the Exhortation and Kohima Epitaph with the Orchestra sounding the Last Post and the Reveille. The service ended with a blessing from the Padre, followed by the United Kingdom and Belgian National Anthems and the march-off of the Standards to the tune of the March of the Belgian Air Force.



Lady Harper with Arnould and Louise-Marie d'Oultremont

Following the service there was a welcome opportunity for guests to have a close-up view of the new Shields before moving to.....



Léon Rubin and Brigitte Horton



....the Club Prince Albert for a very convivial Reception most kindly hosted by the Chief of Defence.



Photographs Norbert Niels and Daniel Orban: see <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rafabelgianbranch/>

IN MEMORIAM

Lieutenant Colonel Robert 'Bobby' Bladt,



Born at Neder-Over-Heembeek (Brussels) on 14 May 1919, Lieutenant Colonel 'Bobby' Bladt, a long-standing Life Member of the Belgian Branch, passed away at Woluwe-Saint-Lambert on 18th February 2014. He joined the Belgian Royal Military Academy in 1939, was trained as a pilot and was initially posted with his unit to France. Following the fall of Belgium, he set out for England in May 1942, escaping through France and Spain, and reaching England via Gibraltar in October 1942. He joined the RAF and, following flying training, was posted to 350 Sqn in June 1943. He was commissioned in April 1944 and flew a total of some 140 offensive missions (250 operational hours) with the Sqn.

Post-war, he rejoined the Belgian Air Force and flew with 349 and 350 Sqn (and was Commanding Officer of the latter in 1951/52), and subsequently formed and led the 'Red Devils' aerobatic team flying Hunters. He joined the reserve in the rank of Lt Col on his retirement in 1969. His private family funeral was held on 22nd February. We will remember him.

Photograph courtesy of André Bar

IN MEMORIAM

Flight Lieutenant Robert 'Bobby' Laumans,



Born on 4th December 1920 at Tervuren Flt Lt 'Bobby' Laumans, an RAF veteran and long-standing Life Member and good friend of the Belgian Branch, passed away after a short illness on 21st April 2014. He was training with the Belgian military Flying School at the outbreak of War and escaped via France and Morocco arriving in Great Britain in August 1940. He joined the RAFVR and after training as a fighter pilot, flew Spitfires with 74 (Tiger) Sqn and then 350 Sqn. Flying with them on his 48th sortie on 1st June 1942, he was shot down over the Channel.

He managed to bale out safely and survived 3 days and 2 nights in his dinghy before being picked up by the Germans and sent as Prisoner of War to Stalag Luft III. He did not draw a low enough number to take part in the 'Great Escape' but as a key member of the Camp Theatre society his skills as an actor, set and costume designer and artist did much to raise the morale of his fellow prisoners. After repatriation and as the war drew to a close in mid-1945, the Theatre Society got permission from the RAF to put on a series of charity Variety Shows in aid of the Red Cross. They played to packed houses in London's West End and on tour around the Country. The shows proved to be so popular with Press and Public, that when Bobby married Miss Rosemary Titmus on 21 Aug 1945, their wedding photograph was on the front page of the National Newspaper the Daily Mail. Despite promising offers to take up an acting career, he stayed with flying and retrained on the transport fleet with 525 Sqn and then after the war into SABENA for a full career in civil aviation.

Many Branch friends were at the funeral, where a strong RAF 'light blue' presence was led by Air Marshal Stacey. The Branch Standard was paraded, the RAF Flag was draped on the coffin. Eulogies were given by Gp Capt Whittingham and Léon Rubin offering their remembrances of Bobby and offering their heartfelt sympathy to the family.

REPORTS ON PAST EVENTS

Service of Remembrance at Hotton-sur-Ourthe and at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery 4 May 2014.

As arranged by the Brussels Branch of the Royal British Legion in association with the municipal authorities at Hotton-sur-Ourthe, a fine service of remembrance was held in brilliant sunshine on Sunday 4 May 2014. The event started with a Church Service and Mass in the Church at Hotton, followed by wreath-laying at the memorial to the dead of the two World Wars.



The large crowd then followed the magnificent town band up the hill to the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, which was, as ever, perfectly presented and a fine tribute to the work of the CWG Commission. 173 airmen are remembered in the Cemetery, including those who died in the crash of Halifax MX 829 at Tigelot on 2 November 1944.

The Service of Remembrance was led by the President of the Brussels Branch Brigadier Moving tributes were presented by Ambassador to Belgium and RBL Hiltermann.



Remembrance was paid by the British Belgian Mr Jonathan Fisher. RBL Brussels was represented by the RBL Brussels Branch Brigadier Andrew Fisher. RBL Brussels was represented by the RBL Brussels Branch Brigadier Andrew Fisher. RBL Brussels was represented by the RBL Brussels Branch Brigadier Andrew Fisher.

The Branch was strongly represented with Mrs Brigitte Horton and Mrs Deborah Whittingham in attendance; the Branch Standard was paraded by Jean-Pierre Blanckaert.

A Poppy Wreath was laid by Gp Capt Whittingham on behalf of the RAFA Belgian Branch. The RAFA group joined the strong RBL representation for a most convivial combined lunch after the event.



Photos courtesy Brigitte Horton and Doug Mitchell: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rafabelgianbranch/>

Service of Remembrance at Rebecq 28 May 2014



The Memorial at Rebecq this year coincided with the 70th anniversary of the tragedy of the 550 Squadron Lancaster aircraft JA 712 that fell in Rebecq, on May 28th 1944. To mark this anniversary, the Major of Rebecq and our colleague Guy De Braeckeleeer, Chairman of the Rebecq Memorial Association, invited many including the RAF and RAFA to join the local community in solemn tribute for the Lancaster crew, and five other crews of 550 Squadron North Killingholme that crashed in Belgium in 1944. The six tragedies caused

the death of 37 airmen from the 42 aircrews involved. Of the five survivors, four were capture and ended up as Prisoners of War, and one escaped under the protection of the Belgian resistance. 22 civilians from Rebecq involved in the rescue of the survivors were also arrested by the occupants. 3 of these never returned from the concentration camps, where they died.

The ceremony was a moving tribute. As well as the usual suspects attending on the UK side, including the UK Ambassador to Brussels, RAF and RAFA representation and the parading of the RAFA Standard (thank you JP), it was delightful to see the local school children attending and actively participating in the ceremony laying the multitude of wreaths in remembrance. As a slightly biased pilot observer I can state that the highlight of the ceremony was the impeccable to the minute fly-past 3 ship formation of helicopters from the Belgian Air Component, low level directly from behind the memorial and over the crowd line. Poignant and professional.



Post event the Belgian community laid on a wonderful spread in the beautiful village of Rebecq. Local beer and good company in a wonderful setting between the network of streams and small bridges and Cotswold style rustic properties in the heart of Rebecq. The highlight post event was certainly meeting the UK families of the crews who had served both on the Lancaster that had crashed in the village in May '44 (who had only finally made the connection

themselves some 3 years ago having researched their family history with assistance from local historians back home, and the RAF's Air Historical Branch), and the members of the broader association of 550 Sqn who had been regular attendees at the event.

Further detail, photos and history can be found on www.rebecq-memorial.eu

AGM MINUTES ENCLOSURE 1 - ITEM 3 - CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.

The AGM has 3 roles: to agree the Committee for 2014, to provide a stock-take of our Branch for the past year, to provide the Committee with guidance for the future. Let me set the scene before we go through the details under the subsequent agenda items

Let me start with the sad part – as you have heard we have lost far too many of our dear colleagues in the past year, we especially remember Andrée de Norman, Lieutenant General Baron Mike Donnet, Mary Laden, Reverend Charles MacNeil, and, only last week, Rayky Rubin. Our thoughts and sympathy are particularly with you Leon.

But life must move on and I think overall we can count 2013 as being a good year for the Branch. We had an excellent and very special Anglo-Belgian Remembrance Service in the Basilica in September, which brought together a much larger number than we have been able to generate in recent years and evoked strong memories amongst many. It also provided an excellent Public Relations opportunity and I am confident that the Branch profile is higher than it has been for some years and this in turn has encouraged a significant expansion of our membership – 15 new members since last summer is not too bad! Mind you, as CHQ remind us, we should not rest on our laurels.

This resurgence, if I may call it that, has led your Committee to the conclusion that maybe we can be confident of a longer life for the Branch than we had envisaged in recent years and, as you will see under Item 7 this has a knock-on effect for our budget 2014 proposals. Yes, the real Second World War veterans will, eventually (!) pass away, but the 'next generation' is now coming to the fore to maintain and maybe even expand on the interests. I am especially pleased to see people like Michel de Norman and Eddy Laden joining our ranks – they are closely linked to the past, but are now able to address things in a way which is relevant to the young today. The other changing aspect is the incredible power of the modern electronic media – we are just touching the subject with our excellent Branch website, but we can, and I am confident will, do much more in future which will strengthen our role and relevance.

I am pleased that under Item 4 you will see we have proposals for a full committee with a nice balance between serving military, and old and new civilians. Although I am standing down, the Committee have been kind enough to suggest that I retain my Branch linkage as a Vice-President. I would be honoured to serve in that role.

Our Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Welfare Officer continue to work wonders and we will have the opportunity to discuss their reports under Items 5 and 6. As I hope you will have seen from the Newsletter and the website, we have a full programme for this year – please participate where you can – special mention of course for the Barry Horton Golf Tournament and fund-raising event on 11 July: mark your diaries and book-in via the website.

Lastly, let me put on record my heartfelt thanks to our super committee and our other regular supports, in particular our Standard Bearer Jean-Pierre Blanckaert – your hard work and willingness to support has really made a difference to many of our members: thank you.

We have lots to cover under subsequent agenda items, so unless there are any really burning issues, I would like to close this agenda item now and move on.

AGM MINUTES ENCLOSURE 2

ITEM 4 - ELECTION OF BRANCH OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. The following are officials of the Branch who do not require re-election:

Sqn Ldr (Ret'd) E.H.E. Hearn	Branch Honorary Co-President
Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper	Branch Honorary Co-President
Father W. Peeters	Branch Honorary Chaplain

2. After 5 years in post, Gp Capt (Ret'd) R Whittingham will stand-down as Chairman in 2014. Wg Cdr R McKenzie was co-opted onto the Committee as Vice-Chair in June 2013 following the resignation of Wg Cdr G Ward on her retirement from the RAF and on return to United Kingdom. Due to the pressure of his expanded work commitments, Wg Cdr (Ret'd) D Trembaczowski-Ryder will stand-down as Branch Treasurer during the year, but is willing to remain in post until a successor can be found. Flt Lt A Walker resigned as Branch Secretary in March 2014 on posting to United Kingdom. Sgt R Atha will be posted back to United Kingdom during 2014 and hence will, at that time, resign as SHAPE RAFALO.

3. The following prospective Committee members have kindly offered themselves for election*:

Wg Cdr R McKenzie	Chairman
Wg Cdr J P R Smeaton	Vice-Chair
Mr M de Norman et d'Audenhove	Committee Member
Warrant Officer G Warner	Committee Member
Flt Sgt M Coates	SHAPE RAFA Liaison Officer Designate
Flt Lt V Milne	Secretary

4. The following Committee members have kindly offered themselves for election*:

Wg Cdr (Ret'd) D Trembaczowski-Ryder	Honorary Treasurer
Mrs G Walkden – de Coninck	Honorary Welfare Officer
Mrs B Horton - Leblanc	Membership Secretary
Mrs D Whittingham	Assistant Honorary Welfare Officer
Wg Cdr (Ret'd) R Jenkins	Branch Webmaster
Sgt R Atha	SHAPE RAFA Liaison Officer
Sgt M Lawson	Deputy Secretary

5. The Committee propose that in accordance with RAFA Branch Regulation 9, Gp Capt (Ret'd) R Whittingham be elected as a Belgian Branch Vice-President.

* - *'Proposer' and 'Seconder' will be sought from the meeting*

AGM MINUTES ENCLOSURE 5

RAFA BELGIAN BRANCH WELFARE REPORT TO AGM 18 MARCH 2014

Since the 2013 AGM, it is with much regret that we have lost a number of dear friends: Andrée de Norman – former Honorary Welfare Officer, Mary Laden and Rayky Rubin – always ready to give a helping hand. We will greatly miss them. Our thoughts are with their families.

Since the last AGM the Welfare activities have been carried by Deborah Whittingham and I.

As was indicated in our Annual Case Worker Welfare Report to Central HQ, in 2013, we have been as busy as ever, with 62 home and hospital visits and over 325 telephone, mail, postal and non face-to-face contacts, to a dozen cases all around the country. We have dispersed through the Branch welfare account a total of €3,288, of this total, €848 came specifically from Branch welfare funds.

We have no new welfare cases as such, but as our membership has become older, the needs for medical and social support have become greater. From the welfare side, we have lost two clients, a man in Ostend and a long standing member and client in Ruddervoorde. The mother of CD is now very well looked after by the Social Services in Ostend (OCMW), and her financial affairs are in the hands of a lawyer. So, for the time being, we do not have, as previously, to be much involved in this case.

On a financial basis:

- We are very grateful to the **RAF Benevolent Fund** for its consistent support, even in extending and upgrading the maintenance allowances to a deserving client. Since the death of Mrs G. in Ruddervoorde we do not have any client in need of RAFBF financial support.

- From our branch funds we have covered:

- A special radio for a member suffering from eye sight problems.
- Christmas gifts as explained below;
- Membership to RAFA for a paraplegic case.

As far as visits, social contacts and other activities are concerned:

We are trying in the best possible manner to acknowledge queries and problems put to us.

Sadly, however, we are not always in a position to undertake the number of Social calls that are requested of us: we are a small team and I am afraid that we must sometimes prioritise. However, we are very grateful that some of our Branch members are helping us greatly in visiting people at home.

The traditional Christmas visits took place as usual in December in Brussels, Brugge, Ostend, Ligny. On these Christmas visits we are, as usual, giving a small Christmas hamper and to the most deserving, financial gifts as indicated in the Treasurer report. These were greatly appreciated.

Closing remarks

In closing this report Deborah and I invite members to be alert to welfare and friendship needs and to let us know where we might have the opportunity to help.

We wish to thank all the members for their continuous support and for the financial contributions without which we could not have given the help needed.

Ghislaine Walkden

Deborah Whittingham

Brussels March 2014.

ADMINISTRATION

MEMBERSHIP

Unless you are a Life Member, RAFA Membership fees for 2014 are now due. Fees for Ordinary and Associate Members are €25 for a 1 year subscription and €75 for a 4 year subscription. Please transfer funds to RAFA Belgian Branch account BE58 0014 2061 1779 (FOR MEMBERSHIP FEES).

MEMBERS' NEWS

Editor's Note: *in parallel with developments on the Branch website, it is planned that we will introduce this 'Members' News' section in future Newsletters. If you would like to share information or to seek contact with old colleagues, please let us know, via the Secretary or (preferred) via the 'Contact Us' link on the website, and we will publish.*

Fred Dascombe (Belgian Branch member) writes: in June 1944 I was a member of N° 122 (Mustang) Wing which took part in the Normandy Landings. I would be very interested to know of any other member of the Belgian Branch who participated in this campaign.

BRANCH WEBSITE

As many have experienced, the Branch Website is going from strength to strength. It is the ideal way for the Committee to provide members with the most up-to-date information. Please use it if you can: if you would like help in getting on-line, then please let us know.

Main Branch Site: <http://rafabelgianbranch.yolasite.com>

Branch Photo Repository: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rafabelgianbranch/sets/>

Dedicated site for the Air Force Chapel: <http://www.theairforcechapel.be/>

The 'Archive' aspects of the website are being progressively expanded. In the 'Chronological Archive' see historic First Day Covers from 1989 e.g. as below commemorating the Remembrance Service in the Air Force Chapel on 22 Oct 89.



FUTURE EVENTS CALENDAR

19 and 20 Jun 14 (Thursday and Friday) – Memorial at As-en-campine. Dedication of memorial to RAF pilot, Pilot Officer Guy PENRY, who died on 21 June 1944 when his RAF AVRO Lancaster III crashed near the railway station at As-en-campine (Limburg). He gave his life to save those of his comrades and for the freedom of so many. The Municipal Council of As is marking the 70th Anniversary of the event by holding a service at the grave of PO Penry on 19 Jun (from 12:30 p.m.) and by unveiling a new memorial to the event on 20 Jun (from 4:50 p.m.) Those wishing to attend please contact the Secretary.

28 Jun 14 (Saturday) - Brussels Cemetery in Evere, Royal British Legion Brussels Branch Act of Remembrance at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Evere. The Service will start at 11:30 hrs and will include participation of Branch Officials.

11 Jul 14 (Friday) – Barry Horton Memorial Golf Tournament at the Duisburg Military Golf Club (DMGC). With the kind permission of the DMGC Committee and with the support of the Military Sports Centre, this popular RAFA fund-raising event will follow the successful formula of previous years with 9 holes of golf (for those so inclined), followed by a BBQ dinner for all Belgian Branch Members and friends in the DMGC Clubhouse, plus the famous tombola. See back page of Newsletter for details. **Please let us know NOW via email or phone if you wish to attend.**

12 Jul 14 (Saturday) – Belgian Forces Commemoration at the London Cenotaph. Regular parade by Belgian Forces to reflect 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. Those wishing to attend, please contact the Secretary or email via the Branch website.

26 Jul 14 (Saturday) – Dedication of memorial for Flt Lt Eugene Seghers DFC Croix De Guerre at Uckfield, East Sussex, United Kingdom. Flt Lt Seghers who was born in Ledeborg, Ghent on 7th April 1910 and served on Hurricanes in 32 Squadron during the Battle of Britain (two aerial victories), and later completed a tour on Typhoons in 609 Squadron, before being killed while attacking a V-1 in his 91 Squadron Spitfire XIV on 26 July 1944. The ceremony is being supported by the RAFA and the Belgian Air Component. Branch members are cordially invited. Please contact the Secretary or email via the Branch website.

4 Aug 14 (Monday a.m.)¹ – Liege Belgian National commemoration of centenary of Belgium involvement in the First World War.

4 Aug 14 (Monday p.m.) – CWGC Cemetery at St Symphorien, Mons. United Kingdom National Day of Remembrance commemorating centenary of British involvement in the First World War.

17 Aug 14 (Sunday) - Tigelot Memorial at Jalhay. 63rd annual commemoration in memory of the sacrifice of all Allied Airmen who lost their lives in the High Ardennes in the Second World War. A church service will be held at Jalhay, followed by

¹ *Italic Text indicates First World War Centennial Event*

wreath laying at the memorial to Halifax MZ 829 lost with all crew on the 2nd November 1944: the event will be followed by the normal convivial lunch.

3 Sep 14 (Wednesday) – Belgian National Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Liberation of Brussels. 10:00 - Parc des Muses, Ave Brigade Piron, Molenbeek, Brigade Piron memorial.

11-14 Sep 14 (Thursday-Sunday) Comet Line Commemoration at Saint-Jean-de-Luz. For the 15th year, the Association "Les Amis du Réseau Comète " is organising a Remembrance Event based on Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the Pays Basque and including a Commemorative Walk from ANGLET-SUTAR to JAURIKO BORDA (Navarre) on the paths used by the "passeurs" of the Comète Line and Allied aircrew during the Second World War. There are coach options available. If you are interested in this very special event, please contact Geoff Cooper geoff.cooper@orange.fr

12-14 Sep 14 (Friday-Sunday). Belgian Air Open Days at Kleine Brogel Air Base. After a break of 15 years, the Belgian Air Component is organising public 'open days' at the Kleine Brogel Air Base (between Eindhoven and Hasselt) on 13 and 14 Sep 14. Special discounts are available for RAFA members for the various visitor packages on offer. Additionally RAFA members are cordially invited to participate in a special 'aircrew' day on Friday 12 Sep 14. Those interested in attending on 12 Sep 14, please contact the Secretary. For further information on the public days, see <http://www.belgianairforcedays.be/index.php/en/>

5 Oct 14 (Sunday) – Brussels Half Marathon in aid of the Belgian Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association. This charity event is open to all who enjoy a run and would like to help to raise money to support the work of the Belgian Branch. If you would like to run and think you can raise some sponsorship, please contact the organiser Sgt Mark Lawson at sparkylaw69@hotmail.co.uk or on 02.707.5470.

10-12 Oct 14 – European Area Autumn Conference. The European Area Autumn Conference will be held at the Hotel Melia in Benidorm, Spain, hosted by the North Costa Blanca Branch. The Conference will begin at 17 :00 hrs on Friday 10 Oct and will end after the Church Service on Sunday morning. Further details are available at http://www.rafa-ncb.org/European_Area_Conference_2014.html. Those interested in participating are invited to contact the Belgian Branch Secretary.

11 Oct 14 (Saturday) - Belgian Air Force Remembrance at the Cinquantaire, Brussels.

19 Oct 14 (Sunday) - Comet Line Commemoration Service in the National Basilica, Koekelberg Brussels.

28 Oct 14 (Tuesday)¹ - Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the First World War Battle of Ypres.

1 Nov 14 (Saturday) - Air Force Remembrance at Pelouse d'Honneur des Aviateurs' and at CWG Brussels Town Cemetery, Evere.

7 Nov 14 (Friday) - Commonwealth Torch of Remembrance – Eternal Flame Rekindled. 12:00 - Colonne du Congrès, Rue Royale, 1000 Brussels

9 Nov 14 (Sunday) - RBL Remembrance Sunday Service. 12:00 – Pro-Cathedral Holy Trinity, Brussels

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON EUROPEAN AREA AND NATIONAL CONFERENCES



This year's RAFA European Area Conference was held the day prior to the RAFA Annual Conference in Blackpool on the weekend 16-19 May. Richie Atha braved the passenger seat for the 8 hour journey each way as I

borrowed the family wheels for the weekend trek to Blackpool and back. We had a tight schedule to stick to, and in turns out a lot of socialising to be done in the margins. Arriving on the Thursday night just after midnight - we managed to secure a night cap - and hit the internet to realise that RAFA had splashed out in style and we were staying in a hotel rated 73rd out of 73 in Blackpool according to Trip Advisor! As it turns out this was of little consequence as we hung out with the crowd, where-ever they ended up down the Blackpool strip each evening.

The Friday European Area Conference was held at the same time as the annual RAFALO conference nearby so Richie managed to meet up with old mates and colleagues, while as new Chairman, I met with many many wonderful folk from the overseas and UK branches and got to meet with the leadership of RAFA from both the overseas and Central Council perspectives.

The Friday was very much focused specifically on issues related to our European branches. Dwindling membership, lapsed members, and financial constraints were key themes in common with all branches. However the passion and dedication of these branches was the over-riding take away and it is abundantly clear that despite significant challenges, the European area branches are still going strong.

My 3 key takeaways came from this 3/4 day session:

1. Many branches have welcome packs at Station/Unit arrivals level - we should replicate this.
2. The healthy competition between (European) branches is wonderful and tangible. Standby for some targets for the Belgian branch so we can show our colleagues what we are made of!
3. The issue of Welfare training for European branches was raised again. Belgium is ideally placed and relatively accessible to provide a central point to conduct such training. Something to look at at the tail end of this year. The welfare presentations by Rory O'Connor and his Central Headquarters team over the weekend were first class and enlightening, and will be the subject of a subsequent article in the next edition of our newsletter.

Also of note and a theme throughout the weekend: RAFA strategy is being positively refreshed, with the newly appointed RAFA Secretary General, Nick Bunting at the helm. This is ideal timing as we look to focus on refreshing our own Belgian Branch strategy supporting our own key Welfare deliverables.

So plenty of food for thought for me as your Chairman - and thought that will evolve into strategy and presentations from me to your committee throughout the coming

months, and then with your committees input we can hit the streets and implement our collective ideas when the time is right.

The RAF Association's main conference started on Saturday morning to a weekend of full sunshine and clear skies. As the Belgian delegate I got to sit in and vote on a variety of issues from the vote on the new Central Council members (congratulations again Dick) through to welfare issues, and even the stickiness of the RAFA Wings Stickers! Powerful stuff indeed.

Joking apart, the weekend was enlightening and excellent value. One could not help but be impressed by the passion, dedication, friendliness and clear focus on Welfare and Support issues throughout the delegates, attendees and paid help. The Conference served as a clear reminder to me that the core values that are part of the Military genes and makeup, the esprit de corps, the intangibles that true camaraderie brings to an organisation, the very things that attract young men and women to the RAF - these intangibles become very visible and tangible indeed when looking at RAFA and what we do collectively. As a member led welfare charity we have a lot to be proud of, and we can all associate with the desire to remain in the tight knit community of serving and ex serving personnel and their families. I am humbled and delighted to be a part of it [RAFA] frankly.

Throughout the weekend the village was manned by serving personnel, Air Cadets from 177 ATC, the Calendar Girls fundraisers – dressed in full 1940's vintage style (Richie and I felt duty bound to chaperone the Girls and protect them from all the RAF Pilot types...), Top Gun Racing and Roundall Racing motorbike teams along with staff from around the country. The RAF Falcons parachute display team descended on the exhibition vehicle outside the Winter Gardens to help build Wings windmills for the kids' sandcastles and talk to the public about how they are helping to support the RAF's welfare charity of choice. RAFA welfare personnel were able to talk to the public about the Storybook Wings initiative with their sofa and books providing a comfortable and cosy place to read a child a story in the shade.

Meanwhile, inside the Winter Gardens the organisation's event for its members got under way with an opening ceremony, a silent tribute conducted by the Chaplain in Chief of the Royal Air Force and address by the Mayor of Blackpool. RAFA wanted to highlight the reason the RAF Association was established, which is to provide friendship, help and support to the RAF family. And this year we focused on the welfare we deliver.



On Saturday evening, awards were presented to several branches, RAF station teams and Air Cadet squadrons for their fundraising and membership contributions, including the Ken Jago trophy to Richie Atha for the Overseas RAF Station with the highest Wings Appeal total.

Sunday morning started with a parade along Blackpool sea front to the Armed Forces Memorial. The RAF College Band from Cranwell led the March past and salute to the event's dignitaries. At the memorial there was a service and fly-past from the RAF Tucano Display Team resplendent with the Association's Wings Logo on the underbelly of the aircraft reminding onlookers why we were all there.

Further information can be found at <https://twitter.com/hashtag/RAFAC14>

RAFA CHARITY GOLF MATCH & BBQ



Barry Horton Memorial Golf Tournament
Duisburg Military Golf Club, Friday pm, 11th July 2014



GOLF
Start at 14:00 or 16:00
Open to all Handicaps
Ladies and Men
Special Prizes



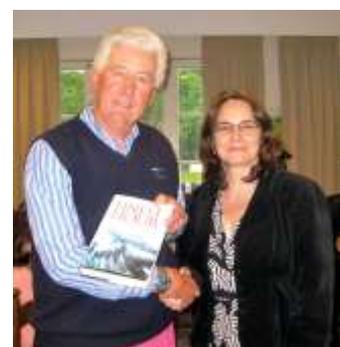
After Golf
Prizes – 18:30
BBQ – 19:00
Tombola – 20:00



Famous Tombola
Donate a Prize
Buy tickets –
buy more, win more!



Golf + BBQ + drinks €45:
DMGC members €25
BBQ with drinks only €25
Pay to RAFA Belgian Branch Account
BE58 0014 2061 1779 'For RAFA Golf'



Help us raise funds to provide welfare and comradeship support for Veterans of the RAF in Belgium
Register by email: rafa.belgianbranch@gmail.com or by telephone to the Secretary 02.707.5470 or
via the Branch website <http://rafabelgianbranch.yolasite.com/>
Event held with the kind permission of the President and Committee of DMGC www.golf.be/duisburg