

LIEUTENANT GENERAL BARON 'MIKE' DONNET CVO DFC

Born 1st April 1917 - Passed away 31 July 2013

Lieutenant General Donnet born of Belgian parents in Richmond, England on 1 April 1917 (exactly one year before the RAF was 'born') passed away on 31 July 2013 at the age of 96. He served during World War II in first the Belgian Air Force and then the RAF. He shot down four enemy aircraft confirmed, and achieved the RAF rank of Wing Commander. After the war, he returned to the Belgian Air Force, and held several important commands.

Before retiring in 1975 he was appointed as the Belgian Representative on the NATO Military Committee. He joined the Belgian Branch of RAFA in 1967, and served as the Branch Chairman from 1975 to 1979 and was made Branch Honorary Life Vice-President in 1985.

General Donnet trained as a pilot with the Belgian Air Force and, after the German invasion of the Low Countries on 10 May 1940, he flew reconnaissance missions in support of the retreating armies until he was captured on 1 June following the capitulation of Belgium. He later escaped from German-occupied Belgium by working with a colleague to repair an old Bi-Plane found in a German depot and flying it to England. He was commissioned in the RAFVR and trained on Spitfires before joining No 64 Squadron in November 1941. After completing 100 operations, many over enemy territory at low level, attacking trains, armed ships and gun posts, he was awarded the DFC for his 'great courage and devotion to duty'. After a period as a fighter instructor, he was given command of 350 Squadron, the first all-Belgian squadron to be formed in the RAF. He later commanded the Hawkinge and Bentwaters Wings before completing his final 375th operational sortie on 6 May 1945. The Branch was strongly represented at his funeral: the Branch Standard was paraded and the RAF Flag was draped on his coffin. Léon Rubin gave a eulogy highlighting his loyal and true support to the RAFA Belgian Branch for over 45 years, and the Branch offered its heartfelt sympathy to Jacqueline and the family.