

RAFA BELGIAN BRANCH WINTER LUNCH 10 DEC 12

WELCOME SPEECH BY CHAIRMAN

Air Marshal, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to our Branch Winter Lunch – very good to see you all here: old and new members and our stalwart and very hard working committee without whose efforts the Branch would surely die.

Short speech! Special welcome:

Sir Christopher and Lady Jan: many thanks for giving priority to RAFA. Your involvement is particularly valuable as we try to bring together the veterans and those still serving and working. Congratulation on your appointment as DG IMS next year that will mean you stay rather longer in Brussels: hope you will continue your role with the Branch.

Very special welcome too to some old friends who have really pulled out all the stops to be with us today – this is exactly what we mean by the Association having ‘comradeship’ as a prime aim. Andrée, Hélène, you have had a really pretty horrid time in the last year so we are very pleased to see you now improving and able to join us today. Also welcome our other veterans Léon, Rayky and Bobby (now 92 last week): good to see you all in such fine form.

Especially pleased to see a good sprinkling of new faces – welcome to you all, but I would like to introduce those who have been helping out at ceremonial events in the past year. Richard Atha a volunteer to become the RAFA Liaison Officer at SHAPE - super to see this post filled again after a long gap. Gary Warner from the EU Staffs who has really jumped into the representational scene – become very popular with our colleagues (ladies?!) in Comet Line! Lastly Ross Mckenzie who works in the HQ, done a super job showing the light blue at Belgian air force events: he has a Belgian wife, so I trust that he will be around a while!

Some apologies from those who would love to have been here. In particular Edward and Paule Hearn and Mike and Jacqueline Donnet. Also from our Comet Line colleagues Brigitte and Nadine who are in London for an Escaping Lines reunion.

Only 2 additional points:

Firstly, I cannot let the occasion go by without publicly thanking our 2 major Branch benefactors this year: first Dorothy Burch who now lives in England but who made a very significant donation to be ‘spent wisely’ in support of Branch members. The Committee are of course doing their best to meet her request, but we note also that she was prompted to do this by her memories of ‘Happy Days’ with the Branch. I hope to be able to report to her that our event today is one such happy day. Our other benefactor is Ann Robins who has again been most generous in memory of her father Stanley who was a long standing Branch member. Our thanks to them both.

Lastly, let me return to the ‘comradeship’ theme. It is basically about keeping in touch between all elements of the Air Force communities in Belgium. You working chaps are, I know, up to your ears with things that really matter – so my plea is to remember your Association colleagues and use us, via the medium of the Newsletter, email and now of course our excellent Branch website, to help keep things together. First event to think about is our AGM on 5 March.

So, I think the lunch today shows that the Branch is in good order, and so I would ask you to join me in a toast to the Royal Air Forces Association (I suggest that we follow Royal Navy traditions and remain seated!)