

AIRmail

Keeping you informed

80th Anniversary

Spring 2024 • rafa.org.uk

 **ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association**
The charity that supports the RAF family

THE MIND IN FOCUS

Strength, finding the
right fit and WWII
superstition

FEATURES

The changing face
and faiths of the RAF's
chaplaincy team

NEWS

RAFAKidz nurseries
network celebrates
fifth anniversary

EVENTS

The launch of this
year's RAFA Rides – our
biggest event yet

AND MORE

The 80th anniversary
of D-Day and the latest
news from your branch

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Cover image:

The latest cockpit displays, such as the Typhoon, need different cognitive and thinking skills. The pilot's BAE Systems Striker II helmet projects data directly onto the visor and augments the real world view with mission-critical information.
© BAE Systems

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Welcome

May 2024 marks a historic moment for your magazine. It will be exactly 80 years since the first *Air Mail* was printed and distributed to members. The publication has marked the Association's and the

Royal Air Force's history in the 20th and 21st century – as directly witnessed by Association

members. We will be marking the milestone by sharing a selection of archive stories from the past eight decades. I also make an anniversary plea – if anyone has a copy of the precious first issues, we'd be delighted to see them; the archive is a little thin from 1944 to 1947.

As well as looking back to the start of the magazine, we will be looking forward. A digital version of this Spring edition will be sent by email to every eligible member for whom we have an email address. If we don't have yours, and you'd like to get the magazine by email, please use the various methods below to update your contact details.

It's a huge honour to continue the publication. Welfare and connection has always been the foundation stone of this Association. So this issue we look at just some of the ways the RAF looks after its personnel. The contents page (p7) is bursting with tasters of all the features and news.

ANNIE O'BRIAN, EDITOR

Above: A scan of the cover of the first *Air Mail*.
Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum

CONTACT YOUR ASSOCIATION

YOUR ASSOCIATION

For any enquiries about your membership of the Royal Air Forces Association, to volunteer or get support, use the contacts below:

- 0800 018 2361**
- @RAFAssociation**
- @RAFAssociation**
- @raf.association**
- enquiries@rafa.org.uk**
- RAFAssociation**

rafa.org.uk/portal
For 24/7 access to your Members' Portal, which also contains a digital version of this magazine.

Headquarters
RAF Association, Atlas House,
Wembley Road, Leicester, LE3 1UT.



Talking Air Mail

An audio version of this magazine is available for visually impaired members. Call 0800 018 2361 and ask about receiving Talking Air Mail. It's free.



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Drop zone

"When [a parachutist] comes into the drop zone anything can change," says RAF photographer Sergeant Lee 'Matty' Matthews. "This was our last day in Switzerland, and the Falcons' final jump. It was our one chance with those incredible mountains as the backdrop."

The Shot' won the Personnel category at the 2023 RAF Photographic Competition. It shows Sergeant Paddy Guillois of RAF Falcons at the ZigAirMeet air show in Switzerland. The RAF Association was one of the Falcons' charities of choice in 2023.

Read more from Lee 'Matty' Matthews in his Airtime member's story on page 55.

 Watch Matty's video interview at the 2023 RAF Photographic Competition awards ceremony at: rafa.org.uk/photos

For Crown & Country Personalised D-Day 80 Lapel Badge

AWARD has commissioned a special D-Day 80 edition of the personalised For Crown & Country lapel badge to mark the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy between 6th June and 20th August 1944.

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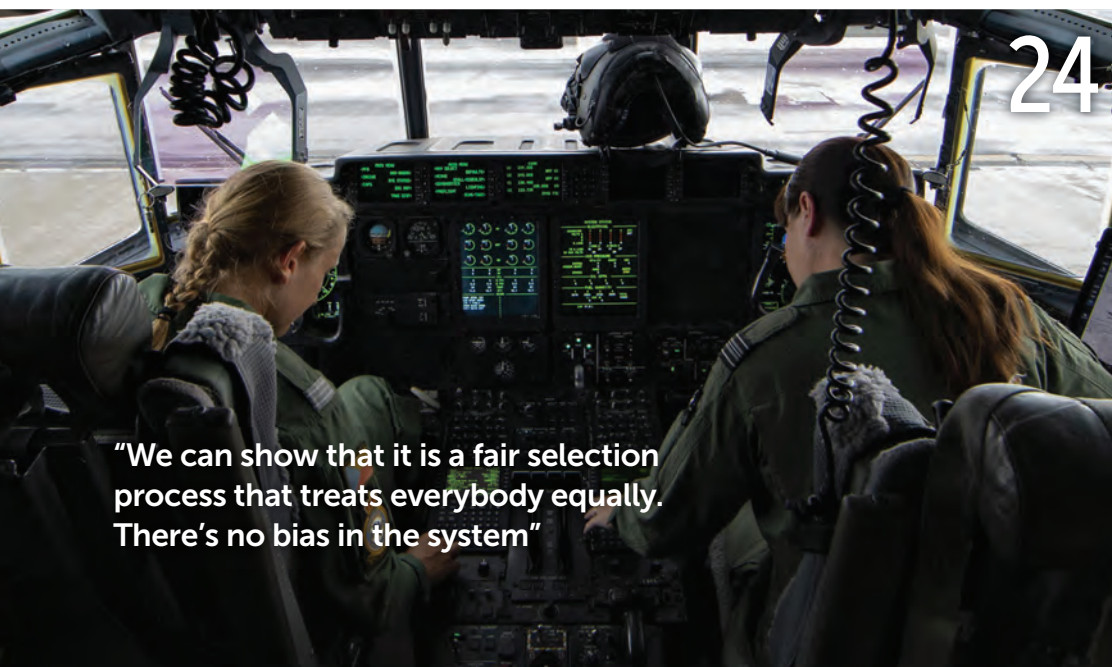
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“Partnerships: vital to the UK, the RAF and the RAF Association”

As well as being the 80th anniversary of your magazine, 2024 is a notable year for several reasons.

In June, we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings. D-Day was a significant turning point in the Second World War, made possible thanks to the coming together of the Allied forces – a community of nations united by a shared mission: defending our freedoms and our way of life.

April 2024 is the 75th year of NATO, now a transatlantic alliance of 31 nations and a living embodiment of the power of the collective. The combined strength of NATO is unequivocal. This strength enables us to stand steady in the face of continued acts of aggression by Russia, and others.

As referenced by the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, during his latest RUSI lecture, the combined GDP of NATO countries is 20 times greater than Russia's. Combined with our NATO allies, Britain's 140,000-strong regular armed forces are part of a force of three million service personnel.

For more than 90 years, the RAF Association has

played a unique role in support of our RAF community; that of a central, coalescing force. Partnerships, 'allies', are vital to the UK, vital to the RAF and vital to the RAF Association. Together, we stand up for what is good and for what is right.

The Association's strength is in its global network – our members, supporters, volunteers and employees – working as one powerful and sustainable team. I am extremely proud that every day, this force of over 66,000 people really does make lives better – as you'll see in some of the features in this issue.

The thousands of local wellbeing events held by our branches provide individuals with companionship, support and a helping hand. As an integral part of local community support networks, in the past year your branches have played an increasingly important role, providing warm places, hot meals and food parcels to those struggling to put food on the table. You have taken action to help members of our community to maintain familial connections with loved ones who live far away, and you have created buddy systems to support older members who are experiencing loneliness and isolation.

With a field-force of more than 1,000 highly-trained welfare volunteers, our Association makes a powerful difference within your local communities. These wonderful volunteers have the expertise and networks to help those who are in acute need. Everything we achieve together is only possible with the Association's focus on bringing our community, our partners, our allies together in support of those who need us. The impact that we have and the work that we deliver together could not be a clearer demonstration of this. **A**



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Air Marshal Sir Baz North,
President of the RAF Association

AIR MARSHAL SIR BAZ NORTH, PRESIDENT

news

● **IN THIS SECTION** Find the latest news from the Association, including fundraising success, nationwide events and more ways you can get involved



TURN TO PAGE 19

Discover how the Red Arrows plan to mark their 60th display season in 2024

RAFAKIDZ



The team on opening day at RAFAKidz Abbey Wood, ready to welcome children and parents

RAFAKidz turns five

As RAFAKidz celebrates its fifth anniversary, the nursery network has expanded to four new locations

THE RAFAKIDZ group has grown again in 2024, with the opening of another four nurseries. RAFAKidz Abbey Wood, located just outside Bristol at MOD Abbey Wood, opened its doors to children and families on 8 January. This April, three more RAFAKidz nurseries will open, at MOD Boscombe Down, RAF Cosford and RAF Shawbury.

This takes the number of nurseries in the RAFAKidz network to 14. The others are at: MOD Worthy Down and RAF Brize Norton, Boulmer, Cranwell, Digby, High Wycombe, Leeming, Medmenham, Odiham and Walter's Ash.

Nicola Davies, Director of Operations at RAFAKidz says: "It's heartening to hear reports of how RAFAKidz is contributing to the operational effectiveness of the RAF – from giving parents the comfort of knowing their children are well cared for, to allowing children to seamlessly move from one RAFAKidz nursery to another when their parents are deployed."

AWARDS

Honoured

Two long-term supporters of the RAF Association were recognised in the King's New Year Honours List.

Association trustee Air Commodore Alan Opie has been awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). Alan also sits on the Welfare Committee and previously chaired the Safeguarding Committee.

RAF Association Ambassador the Honorary Group Captain Duncan Barber FRAeS was named Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his services to the defence industry.



© Personal archive

In total, more than 100 personnel across the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force were recognised in the 2024 New Year Honours for their commendable service and commitment.

Top: Duncan Barber was named OBE for his services to the defence industry
Right: RAF Association trustee Alan Opie was awarded the CBE



© RAF Association

Veteran Cards for service leavers

Veterans who left the Armed Forces before December 2018 can now verify their veteran status with an HM Armed Forces Veteran Card.

The Veteran Card has already been provided to all service leavers as part of the discharge process from 18 February 2019, and retrospectively to those who left on or after 17 December 2018.

Apply for a Veteran Card online at gov.uk/veteran-card or telephone the Veterans' Helpline on **0808 1914 218** to ask for a paper application form.



New charity debit card

The Association has launched a debit card which will help supporters save money on foreign transactions and allow them to donate each time they spend in the UK and abroad. The card, in partnership with Currensea and Mastercard, is a convenient way to raise funds for the work of the RAF Association.

The debit card is easy to set up and you don't need a new bank account. Instead, it links with an existing bank account and works with all major UK high street banks. Each time the cardholder spends, they can simply round up the purchase to a chosen amount to donate.

Additional savings of at least 85 per cent can be made on bank fees on foreign transactions, which are covered by Mastercard's 120-day chargeback protection. Cardholders can also opt to donate a percentage of these savings from foreign transactions to the Association.

Donations can be easily managed and tracked by downloading the Currensea app, meaning the cardholder remains in control and can donate as much or as little as they like.

More information can be found at: rafa.org.uk/currensea



Storrington residents have enjoyed bingo nights using the hub in their communal area

TECHNOLOGY

Distance no longer a problem

Residents living 366 miles apart at Rothbury and Storrington have competed in a pub quiz, thanks to technology newly installed in their RAF Association retirement complexes.

More than 20 people at each location formed teams for the first inter-complex quiz, using digital hubs to connect across the country. Storrington is the latest residence to install a hub in its communal areas and already uses it to run popular bingo and film nights. Residents have also used it to benefit from 'Finding it Tough?' and Navigating Dementia training courses.

Storrington residents are also testing seven Amazon Echo Show devices (Alexas) in their private flats. These are already helping make life more fun and more efficient. As well as playing radio, having *Air Mail* read to them or making voice or video calls to their families, users can check the week's organised activities and trips, or log maintenance issues. They can

also still chat with neighbours if they are isolating because they are unwell.

Independent Living Manager, Laura White, said: "Many residents are already tech-savvy. The Alexas mean they can do all they want on one device. For me, all the maintenance requests are logged in one place. In future, we can program the devices so residents with mobility problems can switch lights or heating on and off with voice commands. We also hope to use the hubs to link up with local Association branches and clubs for music nights and other social events."

Following on from its support for Rothbury House, tech firm The Digital Line has generously provided the Storrington hub and is helping to train the residents to use it and the Alexa devices, so they can make the most of their potential. Discussions are underway to expand the service to Wexford House and Dowding House.

Best Sellers

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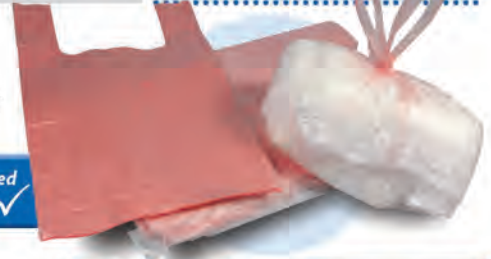
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EVENTS

See you there

What better way to remind yourself of a wonderful air show than a lovely souvenir. In 2024, RAFATRAD Ltd will be at the best of the events, so if you want to browse its selection of licensed RAF aircraft and Red Arrows merchandise or simply talk about the RAF Association's work, the team would love to see you. Its range of merchandise on offer gets bigger and better every year, and includes gifts, models, books, homewares, jewellery and watches, clothing, toys and much more. Everything sold raises funds for the RAF Association's welfare work.

As *Air Mail* went to press, RAFATRAD was planning to be at the following air shows:

- 31 May to 2 Jun** Midlands Air Festival, Warwickshire
- 1-2 Jun** English Riviera Airshow, Torbay
- 1-2 Jun** Duxford Summer Air Show D-Day 80, Cambridgeshire
- 9-10 Jun** RAF Cosford Airshow, Wolverhampton
- 28-30 Jun** North East Lincolnshire Armed Forces Day, Cleethorpes
- 29 Jun** Scarborough National Armed Forces Day, North Yorkshire
- 6-7 Jul** Wales National Airshow, Swansea
- 13-14 Jul** Southport Airshow, Lancashire
- 19-21 Jul** Royal International Air Tattoo, Fairford, Gloucestershire
- 27-28 Jul** Old Buckenham Airshow, Norfolk
- 12-13 Aug** Blackpool Airshow, Lancashire
- 15-18 Aug** Airbourne – Eastbourne International Airshow, East Sussex
- 22-23 Aug** Clacton Airshow, Essex
- 30-31 Aug** Bournemouth Air Festival, Dorset
- 6-7 Sep** International Ayr Show – Festival of Flight, South Ayrshire
- 1 & 15 Sep** Duxford Battle of Britain Airshow, Cambridgeshire

Please note, RAFATRAD Ltd's attendance at these events may be subject to change, cancellations or postponements because of events beyond our control.

NEWS

A Voice For All – latest

At Annual Conference 2024 delegates will have the opportunity to debate and vote on a matter critical to the future of the organisation.

A series of draft resolutions will be put to a vote. These were agreed by Council in February 2024 and based on the work and findings of the A Voice For All working group.

“Branches now represent a smaller proportion of the membership than they once did”

A Special Resolution, and subsequent resolutions, propose that ‘all members of the Association are given the right to vote on Association elections and resolutions, through a direct vote of all of the membership’. It is a Special Resolution as the proposal would require a change to the Royal Charter and the rules – so it will require a 75 per cent majority to pass.

The Special Resolution is being proposed to address the imbalance with member enfranchisement. Currently, 75 per cent of members are formally enfranchised, however, because of the number of non-compliant branches, and branches that chose not to use their vote at Annual Conference 2023, in actual fact only 44 per cent of members were represented by votes.

Direct/individual voting would mean that 100 per cent of the

membership is enfranchised and has the opportunity for its voices to be heard fairly and democratically.

Air Vice-Marshal Mark Neal, Chair of the Branch and Membership Committee and Vice-Chair of Council, said: “There continues to be a significant decline in the number of active branches. Simultaneously, the number of members who choose to be on the Headquarters roll, or part of a registered members group, is increasing. However, those groups are currently unable to have their views represented by a voting delegate at Annual Conference.

“These factors mean that branches now represent a smaller proportion of the membership than they once did, resulting in thousands of our members being disenfranchised.

“Individual voting provides a solution to that imbalance. It strengthens the democracy of the Association and means our organisation would be shaped and guided by representatives from all areas of the community it is there to serve: serving personnel, veterans and their families.

“Collectively, we have a responsibility to make sure the decision-making process at Annual Conference is democratic and representative. Branches have a key role to play in this and we encourage all branches to actively participate and vote on the A Voice For All resolution at Annual Conference 2024.”

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Mark via Trustpilot



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Mrs. K, April 2023

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No1 issue for personnel

Issues with service accommodation accounted for more than a third of all incoming reports to the RAF Families Federation in 2023

CASE FIGURES recently released by the Wittering-based team reveal that, from January to December, 202 housing cases were flagged to them by service personnel or their families. Issues ranged from unresolved black mould in Service Families Accommodation to reallocation of accommodation and missed contractor appointments.

Families Federation Director, Maria Lyle, said: “Although we have noticed improvements with how

issues are dealt with by contractors, it is still the number one problem reported to us, by some margin. Some big changes are due to be introduced in 2024 around how service accommodation is allocated and charged.

“We support a wide consultation on these changes, including an approach that considers the impact to all ranks.”

For more information, and contact details for the RAF Families Federation, visit raf-ff.org.uk

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IN BRIEF



© Personal archive

Nuclear Test Medal recipient

In October 2023, John Noble of Coningsby and District Branch was recognised for his service on Christmas Island. He worked as a cook on the island between May 1963 and April 1964, during the clean-up phase of Operation Grapple – Britain’s nuclear weapons testing programme.

John went on to serve in the RAF for more than 30 years, ending up as Warrant Officer Catering at RAF Coningsby.

The long-campaigned-for Nuclear Test Medal was announced by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in November 2022. Branch colleagues and friends at RAF Coningsby arranged for John’s medal to be formally presented to him by Air Chief Marshal Sir Rich Knighton, during one of the Chief of the Air Staff’s pre-planned visits to the station.

Extra cash for pensioners

Armed Forces Pensions are set to rise significantly from April 2024. The Forces Pension Society (FPS) is welcoming the government’s decision to increase services pensions in line with the consumer prices index – a rise of 6.7 per cent. Serving personnel will see a 7.7 per cent rise.

Separately, the FPS has published further guidance for service pension holders affected by the AFPS15 Remedy (McCloud). To help people work out if they are eligible, the Society has published a flow-chart guide (accessible via the QR code). Members of the FPS can also get advice from the Society’s pensions experts. Find out more about joining at: forcespension.society.org



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a family."**

- Al Dyer



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Exercise Red Flag 24

RAF Typhoons, a Voyager air-to-air refueller and Rivet Joint electronic surveillance crews joined engineers, air controllers, space specialists and a variety of support personnel on Exercise Red Flag 24. Red Flag is an advanced aerial combat training exercise held annually by the United States Air Force, involving more than 3,000 personnel from the US, UK and Australia.

Red Flag 24's first phase was flown from Nellis Air Base in Nevada and gave the international teams the opportunity to plan together and fight against real aircraft playing the roles of adversaries in a realistic scenario.

The second phase of the exercise saw the various fighter squadrons disperse to locations along the west coast of the US. From these locations they continued the fight in a training area more than 500 miles off the US Pacific coast.

The air combat was coordinated by air controllers from the UK, US and Australia. RAF

personnel were assigned the critical role of mission commander. A team from UK Space Command was also embedded into the US Air Force Warfare Centre.

Electronic surveillance crews from 51 Squadron flew onboard a US Rivet Joint aircraft alongside their US colleagues. UK and US Rivet Joint crews are completely interchangeable, and the RAF crew members were able to use their recent operational experience to mentor US colleagues.

The Voyager crew was also able to put its training into practice when a tyre blew out during take-off. To minimise the risks of landing with damaged wheels, the crew extended their sortie to reduce the amount of fuel and weight on board. This also provided time for all fighter jets to return to base before the Voyager, as it was possible it could damage the runway upon landing.

With US Air Force firefighters on standby, the pilots managed to land the aircraft safely.

Protecting the Red Sea

RAF Typhoons, supported by Voyager tankers, joined US forces in strikes against Houthi sites in Yemen from January onwards. The aircraft used



Paveway IV precision-guided bombs to strike multiple targets at military sites being used for launching attacks against international shipping in the Red Sea. The purpose was to degrade

the Houthis' capability to conduct such attacks in future. In line with UK standard practice, a rigorous analysis was applied in planning the strikes to minimise any risk of civilian casualties.



Apache helicopters en route to Norway for cold-weather training

Arctic winter training

An RAF C-17 Globemaster recently delivered Army Air Corps Apache helicopters to Royal Norwegian Air Force Base Bardufoss.

The aim was to allow Joint Helicopter Command personnel to train and successfully complete environmental qualifications in the Arctic winter.

It also provided an opportunity to learn how to live and operate in one of the world's most hostile environments, where temperatures can fall to -30°C.

Such training ensures that UK military personnel can operate globally to protect the UK's interests, particularly alongside NATO and partner nations.



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The Duke of York's Royal Military School is committed to supporting the British Forces and is sponsored by the Ministry of Defence. In recognition of this, parental contribution for those eligible for the Continuity of Education Allowance is only £506 per term (£1,517 per annum). Students make outstanding progress academically, with students from Forces families achieving over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a grade higher than the national average. Our full-boarding community, offering continuity of education, is home to over 200 students from Forces families. We pride ourselves on offering outstanding pastoral care, ensuring students feel relaxed and happy in their home away from home.

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Aeronautical award winners

The Royal Aeronautical Society has announced the 2023 winners of the global aerospace community's most prestigious and long-standing awards, honouring achievement and innovation.

The RAF's 100 per cent Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) Voyager Team was awarded the Society's Silver Medal for achieving the first flight of a large military aircraft without fossil fuels, and the first UK flight powered by SAF.

As well as the SAF Voyager Team, the RAF's Flight Lieutenant George Doyle also picked up the Society's Herbert le Sueur Award for his contributions to improving survival equipment technician engineering practices.

The awards recognise and celebrate individuals and teams who have made an exceptional contribution in the aerospace, aviation or space industries, whether for an outstanding achievement, a major technical innovation, exceptional leadership or for work that will further advance the industry.



The Red Arrows will mark their 60th season with a new nine-aircraft show

Red Arrows' 60th celebrations

The Red Arrows recently announced plans to mark their 60th display season in 2024.

A new nine-aircraft show will feature during the milestone season, performing their trademark Diamond Nine formation and other classic manoeuvres in the Red Arrows' ever-changing display routine.

A five-week overseas tour to Canada was also announced, which will take place later this summer to help mark the centennial of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Anniversary artwork will be applied on the side and tailfin of the team's aircraft, which will acknowledge the diamond season and include outlines of two Red Arrows Hawk jets trailing patriotic colours.

Preparations for the new

season have been taking place at the team's home station of RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire and at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. The first nine-aircraft formation of the year was flown in the UK during a training sortie in February.

UK and mainland European displays are expected to be staged in May, June, July, the first half of August and early-October.

The tour to Canada, named Maple Hawk, will take place in the second half of August and follows an invitation made by the Royal Canadian Air Force.

"The visit will highlight the strength of the long and enduring partnership between the UK's military and Canada's Armed Forces," said Wing Commander Adam Collins, Officer Commanding the Red Arrows.



Don't forget to claim your discount!

Association members receive a discount on subscriptions to the RAF's fortnightly publication *RAF News*. Call *RAF News*/Johnson Press on **01293 312 191** or visit rafa.org.uk/rafnews. You will need to give your RAF Association membership number to subscribe.



New RAFA Rides events for 2024

Sign up for this incredible global cycling challenge – join one of three physical rides or take part from wherever you are in the world with RAFA Rides Your Way

Enthusiastic amateurs, teenagers and sportive 100-milers are oiling their bike chains and pulling on their lycra for RAFA Rides events in 2024. And several hundred Polish Wings cyclists have promised to join them.

This year, the seventh in the RAFA Rides series, riders will have a choice of three physical rides at Kendrew Barracks, RAF Marham or RAF Brize Norton, or of joining from wherever they are in the world by taking part in our global Zwift ride or RAFA Rides Your Way.

Described by previous participants as: “the premier service charity event” and “an excellent experience from start to finish – though my legs say otherwise!”, RAFA Rides is known for its immaculate organisation and its care and support for its riders – whether they opt for the 25-, 50-, 75- or 100-mile routes.

Group Captain Mark Lorriman-Hughes first took part in 2023 when he was station commander at RAF Waddington. A novice rider, he said: “I had some gear and a little less idea. I attempted the 100-mile event. It nearly broke me but

Why?

To build a strong community that connects individuals through common purpose and passion, to improve physical and mental wellbeing and to raise funds for the RAF Association

Where and when?

Find out at: rides.rafa.org.uk

RAF Marham

Sunday 2 June

- New for 2024
- 25- to 100-mile routes

The only charity ride that takes you down the runway of an operational fast jet station.

RAF Brize Norton

Saturday 8 June

- New for 2024
- 25- to 100-mile routes

Breathtaking Cotswolds scenery and a route inside the wire of the UK’s largest RAF station.

Kendrew Barracks

Saturday 15 June

- 25- to 100-mile routes

Includes two flypasts at the former home of the RAF’s Harrier Force.

RAFA Rides

Your Way

**Any date/
Saturday 15 June**

• New for 2024
Take part whenever suits you or join our global Zwift event on Saturday 15 June.

I completed it nonetheless, which was down to the genuine team spirit of the riders on the day.”

Lockheed Martin UK has been an integral part of the success of RAFA Rides. The security and aerospace company has been supporting the event since 2019, making this the fourth year that it has been headline sponsor. Through its continued support, Lockheed Martin has played a key role in improving the lives of thousands of members of the RAF community who are in need.

Chief Executive Paul Livingstone says: “I think RAFA Rides is truly unique in terms of the way it brings people together and raises money – but also enables a real connection to the Royal Air Force family. One of the things we really see as a benefit is the connection to the veterans who serve with us. And they can see that as a corporation we stand behind and support them, the people that they served with and their families. Most of our employees who attend RAFA Rides have some deep connection with the Air Force. They may be veterans; they may have served; they may be simply working on Royal Air Force programmes and supporting our customers.”

Paul adds: “One of the things we love about supporting the RAF

Association is that it recognises the sacrifices that are made by wider family members and comes together to support them. It’s a philosophy we have in our own company. When we look at supporting our own employees, we understand that it takes the whole team, including that wider family.”

“I think RAFA Rides is truly unique in terms of the way it brings people together and raises money”

“If you’re thinking about signing up for RAFA Rides, stop thinking and start signing,” Paul says. “Just get on with it. It’s a brilliant day, you’ll have fun, you’ll ride with some great people and hopefully the sun will even shine for you.”

The event is open to everyone in the RAF and also to the public. Previous participants include station chaplains, grandfathers doing tandem rides with their granddaughters, retired service personnel in New Zealand, and cycling enthusiasts with no service connection enjoying their local countryside. All are welcome. **A**

7
years of
RAFA Rides
in numbers

3,200
PARTICIPANTS... SO FAR

£450,000
raised... so far

£110,000
raised in 2023 alone

This year

- 3 PHYSICAL EVENTS
- 1 GLOBAL VIRTUAL EVENT
- OR RAFA RIDES YOUR WAY

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months into their relationship, Nivedita became pregnant – which came as a shock as doctors had told her she wouldn't be able to have children.


The couple had nowhere to live at this point, but they were determined to do the best they could for their child. It was then that the RAF Association's highly trained casework team stepped in to help them prepare for their baby's arrival.

The Association assigned Oliver a dedicated caseworker, called Oscar, who took the time to get to know Oliver and his circumstances, and to work out the best way to support him and his family.

Oscar arranged access to practical and financial support so the couple could get the vital supplies they needed for their new baby and pay the first month's rent on their new home. "We were so grateful – I don't take it lightly and I don't take it for granted," says Oliver.

“Within two years, I went from being a business owner with two properties to losing everything”


The couple's daughter, Ellora, was born in June, and after four weeks living in accommodation provided by Nivedita's parents, the family were finally able to move into their new home in Earl's Court, London.

Oliver is now enjoying being a dad and working part-time as a handyman for a company in London. "I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing, which seems to be working. I plan on getting a full-time job when Ellora goes to school, but for now, I'm focusing on living clean and sober, and being a father." 

 **Do you need support?** Whether you need someone to talk to, help finding financial support, some time away to rest or something else entirely, we can help you find a solution. Find out more at rafa.org.uk/get-support

“We were so grateful”

A homeless family were able to move into their own flat thanks to support from the RAF Association

 Oliver joined the RAF in 2002. He enjoyed a successful career as an Electrical Engineer and did two tours of Oman, but he began to struggle with drug addiction.

After leaving the RAF in 2008, Oliver tried to get his life back on track, but his dependence spiralled out of control. When he reached a point where he couldn't afford to heat his flat or pay the rent, he knew something had to change.

"Within two years, I went from being a business owner with two properties to losing everything. I was down to my last bit of money. I decided I needed to spend it on something worthwhile – rehab."

Oliver spent the next few years in several recovery programs, and was eventually diagnosed with complex PTSD. "I'm three years in recovery and two years clean and sober," says Oliver, now 40.

In rehab, Oliver met his partner Nivedita, although they agreed not to embark on a relationship until they had both finished their treatment.

In 2021, a year after leaving rehab, Oliver and Nivedita got together. A few

Oliver, Nivedita and Ellora are so grateful to have a roof over their heads

IDENTIFYING THE TALENT

Margaret Bailey has spent the past 32 years applying rigorous psychological analysis to recruiting and selection, so the RAF can be sure it has selected the best possible person for every role

The way the different generations interact with technology changes. In the old days you and I spoke into our old phones. Now your son/my daughter, whenever they have got a phone, they use their two thumbs and they're going to type. It's just a new way."

Margaret Bailey is explaining her work – assessing whether candidates have the aptitude to join the Royal Air Force and whether they are suitable for the jobs they dream of once they get in. She's a Chartered Occupational Psychologist, and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, who has been in her role since 1992. "We need to bear in mind how new generations perceive and solve problems, education standards and experiences in everyday life that evolve over time," she says. "So, whenever we develop assessment methods, we need to make sure they can actually assess candidates' capabilities and identify who is better. Otherwise, we run the risk of assessing skills that candidates don't have, or the assessments are too easy or difficult for them. Most importantly, we need to make sure tests are reliable, valid, fair and can predict training performance."

Things were not always this way. Margaret recalls a time when recruitment offices would have made assessments based on factors such as appearance and bearing: "You know that such an approach is very much based on impression. Our whole selection process is now based on cognitive and behavioural competencies that are found to be essential for military training, and we've got a standardised assessment system to ensure the selection process is objective."

The team

The Recruiting and Selection Occupational Psychology Department is a lodger unit based at RAF Cranwell. Part of Air Command, it reports to Director People, and at full strength the team has five psychologists responsible for producing and validating all the different tools and methods the RAF uses to assess candidate potential for initial, phase two and phase three training, whether officer, non-commissioned officer or other rank.

The department works within the wider RAF recruiting and selection team and has a lot of crossover with other services' psychologists and recruitment teams: "We work with the Royal Navy and British Army. Different services and units have different requirements, and have psychologists with different skill sets to provide professional support and advice. Recruiting and Selection utilises assessment techniques such as selection interviews, leadership assessment and aptitude tests, some of which are used for tri-service selection." >



“We need to make sure the methods themselves are reliable, valid and good at predicting training performance”

Applications to join the RAF are open throughout the year. Aptitude testing takes place at the initial stage of the selection process and is then followed by a selection interview, medical and fitness assessments. Officer and non-commissioned officer candidates also have to undertake leadership assessments at the Officer and Selection Centre at RAF Cranwell.

The work

Margaret and her team don't have direct contact with candidates. Their job is to design different assessment methods, including tests to inform the recruiters of the candidates' training potential, which informs a selection decision. "We basically need a good understanding of what trainees have to do to succeed in training, and then we assess their potential to learn and perform. We are responsible for the assessment methods, so we need to make sure they are reliable, valid and good at predicting training performance. We conduct analysis to identify the underpinning training requirements such as cognitive ability, and personal behavioural qualities such as determination. We do a lot of quite complicated analysis and also, during the test development process, we make sure that there is no bias against any individual group."

The selection methods are all validated – evaluated to see how well they can predict training performance. For all selected candidates, initial assessment scores are mapped against the different practical and written examination results that they achieve in training. "So we know how well the selection methods work," adds Margaret.

The RAF's current approach to the assessment process also aims to do people-job mapping, to see what kind of profession a candidate will be best suited to in terms of their aspirations and cognitive abilities. "For example, if they haven't achieved enough in their aptitude scores, or the training potential doesn't match the profession they have applied for and they score well for another profession,

then the recruiters will counsel them to say, 'have you thought about this instead'?

"We take their own aspirations into consideration, because you can have all the ability to do a certain job but if you're just not interested and there's no motivation, you're not going to succeed. It's up to the candidate whether they wish to follow the suggestion and continue with that route. Our role is to identify their talent."

An entire force remit

The development of each of the selection methods, especially aptitude tests, means Margaret's team visits different training units to conduct analysis and meet instructors. "We analyse their syllabus to see what trainees have to learn. We shadow the trainees, look at what they actually have to do, the operational equipment they have to use, and the procedures they have to follow. We work closely with the subject matters of the profession. We map out all the main tasks, break them down bit-by-bit in terms of procedure, the thinking process and so forth, and then we profile the underlying cognitive requirements.

"So, for every single task we ask: 'What kind of information do they have to process? What kind of decisions do they have to make? And what could be the consequences of those decisions?' We map that all out, in terms of the cognitive abilities required for operational success. We use psychology to understand the job requirements. We collect data, create an aptitude profile for all the main tasks, and then we can design the right test. If we've got the right test, great, we use it. If not, we design new ones."

Just one example of this is the aircraft cockpit design. "In the past, the RAF had analogue cockpits, with dials," Margaret explains. "To find out how well the plane was operating, the pilot scanned the dials and if they saw anything unexpected, they'd say, 'OK, let's find out what's happening'. Information was often visible and readily available. But with the new glass cockpits, most of the information is presented on a computer screen. A lot of the information is amalgamated and the pilot has to decide what is displayed. Now, often a warning signal tells the pilot that something isn't right and they then decide

Previous page: Whenever there is a change in the RAF, the Occupational Psychology team needs to redo its analysis: especially for the latest cockpit displays – such as the Typhoon – which will be integrated with the recently contracted BAE Systems Striker II helmet. The Striker II projects data directly onto the pilot's helmet visor and augments the real-world view outside with mission-critical information



what information they need to extract from the system. Cognitively, it is still the same reasoning capability that we're looking at, but the thinking process is different, and that needs different tests."

It's a continuous process of improvement, says Margaret. "There has always been change in the way we [the RAF] do business: new equipment, new operating procedures, new tasks, requirements. When there's a change, we redo the analysis to identify what the new requirements are."

The people around us

An average day for Margaret involves a lot of data analysis, a lot of statistics and a lot of meetings. Her immediate team consists only of psychologists, but she also gets involved with RAF Recruitment marketing colleagues, the day-to-day recruiting personnel, policymakers and computer programmers. Some of them have worked alongside her for many years, which she says really helps: "Our programmers now understand much more about psychology, and really know what I want," she says.

Margaret describes her role as being part of a broad team, working with the different RAF training units as part of a multidisciplinary group. She also has to keep an eye on the academic psychology world – constantly looking out for new research findings that may help her work. And, of course, there is what she calls 'lateral thinking'. When she becomes aware of new everyday practices or inventions – she may say 'that might make the tests more interesting, or allow us to assess elements that we couldn't previously'.

Huge benefits

Since Margaret started with the RAF, the department has developed about 30 different computerised aptitude assessment tests. In January 2022, she received an MBE for her work, which she was grateful to accept on behalf of the team. "We always work to address the different RAF needs, and do our best, because that's what you do, and so to be recognised for it is nice," she said. The assessment methods are internationally admired. They have been sold to many Air Forces including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Belgium, Singapore and Saudi Arabia. >

Left, top: Successful candidates graduating from RAF College Cranwell
Centre: Some assessment techniques such as selection interviews, leadership assessment and aptitude tests are used for tri-service selection – here for air traffic controllers
Bottom: Margaret Bailey, second from right, with members of the team which includes Occupational Psychologists, RAF personnel and IT specialists





“The whole selection system is now driven by the actual operational and training requirements”

cognitive process, you are going through an extra stage – you need to voice your thought, your decision. The time it takes to make and relay that decision is important. In the past, we couldn't really do it because voice recognition systems had difficulty recognising accents.”

What makes her most proud? “The whole selection system is now driven by the actual operational and training requirements. In the past, RAF psychologists used to design tests, or any kind of method, mostly based on assumptions of what the job required trainees to do. Now, all selection methods are evidence-based and there are findings indicating their effectiveness. We found out exactly what the job requirements were, conducted aptitude and behavioural profiling, designed the methods to suit the needs, and then validated them. We have lots of data to show how well the different methods can assess candidates. We can also show that it is a fair selection process that treats everybody equally. There's no bias in the system. That's what I'm most proud of – the whole approach. And it works.”

Margaret's continuing fascination with the subject shines through. “There's always something you can learn and make use of,” she says. “Just open your eyes and have a look around. Get to know the next generation, how they behave, the new operational requirements. Think of anything else that's different, that you can actually do to update the system and make it better.”

And is there anything else she'd like to do? “Just be happy,” she smiles. **A**

There have been many benefits to having computer-based aptitude tests. “The test for an enlisted aviator used to be paper and pencil,” she says. “But because now we can administer it on a computer, making the best use of information technology, the graphics can be far better. Also, we can have dynamic and interactive tests that assess candidates' ability to multi-task, which is essential for aircrew operation.”

Margaret also looks for ways to make the computerised selection tests more fun and interesting, while ensuring they can still reliably assess the different cognitive processes. It's also important to make sure the testing session is not unnecessarily stressful. “It's stressful enough going through a selection process. The assessment scores should be an accurate and clean measurement of cognitive abilities.”

After 32 years, is there anything Margaret would still like to do? “There are so many things that need doing,” she says. “We just need the time. I'd like to develop a test to measure people's aptitude to respond to different situations using voice commands. Some elements of fast jet operation require voice commands; air traffic controllers give voice instructions. So if you look into the

Above, left: The aptitude test room can assess 40 candidates at any one time. Each candidate would have to complete a range of tests assessing different aptitudes. The design of the different tests varies considerably. Candidates may need to complete a test using a bespoke foot pedal, a headphone, a custom-made keypad and/or a mouse

Right: The capability testing for different types of cockpit has to be different. The RAF's Occupational Psychology team looks at the different cognitive and thinking skills needed for pilots to fly traditional analogue cockpit aircraft, such as the Hercules (seen here), and the latest cockpit displays, such as the Typhoon and Striker II helmet on page 25

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'Soon after taking it I experienced that 'light-bulb' moment - I realised my knees felt like they used to. I take Turmeric+ religiously now.'



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LIGHT BLUE – JUST LIKE US

Air Mail spoke to the Chaplain in Chief of the RAF to find out more about the welfare work of the men and women of the 105-year-old chaplaincy profession who support all of the service's personnel, no matter their faith



There is a dit that does the rounds about how the Chaplain in Chief of the RAF recently got raffle ticket number 666 at an RAF Association Conference – and was highly amused. He gives a smile and a similarly light-hearted response when *Air Mail* asks him if he has the longest job title in the RAF?

Chaplain in Chief and Archdeacon for the Royal Air Force The Venerable Doctor (Air Vice-Marshal) Giles Legood MBE KHC says: "I know, extraordinary, isn't it. All just for turning up for work." The grand title is at odds with the main message he is expounding: "Chaplains support everyone, no matter their

rank, religion, background, age or anything. We wear the same light blue uniform, we've done the same selection and training. We are deployed at the same stations and on the same overseas postings. We understand the pressures they are under – and we are outside the chain of command."

In the thick of it

In 2013, Giles deployed on Op Herrick. He's an Anglican and was serving as chaplain to the UK Joint Force Medical Group. After a three-month stint as the only chaplain there, he was appointed MBE in the 2014 Operational Honours List. "If you offered me the chance to go back

tomorrow, I would bite your hand off," he says. "I had a pager which went off night and day. It told me numbers of injured and estimated time of arrival. I'd pull my boots on and get to the hospital – if I wasn't already there. The Chinooks would land a couple of hundred metres away and I'd go into the emergency room.

"It's not all about the patients. Actually it was often about ministering to the staff as well. Some of them were quite young and had never deployed before. They could have been full-time NHS nurses or doctors and reservists and then the RAF, Navy or Army asked them to put their uniform on and deploy. They could have come from a general surgical ward in, say, Peterborough, and then be seeing people with one, two, three or four limbs missing in the brutality of the emergency room at Camp Bastion hospital. The military police would have to check the injured for booby-traps as patients were brought in for surgery. And people forget about the admin staff, the chefs, the military transport and the engineers, and all the other people who make it happen – and who see so much. I'd often work 15 or 16 hours a day. For the chaplains, it's all about teamwork and keeping the mission going."

At the time of writing, RAF chaplains have three overseas tours – four months in the Falklands, time on Op Shader based out of Cyprus, and on Op Kipion for the broader Middle East, based in Qatar. When deployed in the UK, the 60-strong team is attached to stations. "Somewhere like Brize or Waddington might get four or five chaplains. RAF Northolt may get one," Giles explains. "A bigger team would have a Wing Commander as senior chaplain and a number of station chaplains."

Three pillars of support

Giles divides their work into three pillars: religious and spiritual; pastoral; and ethical and moral training. "Religious will be Sunday services, baptisms, weddings, funerals, consecration of standards, Battle of Britain or Remembrance services, or a private communion service with a handful of people in the middle of a desert," he says.

Describing the pastoral and welfare pillar, he says: "Chaplaincy is unlike some other welfare agencies. We are part of [the RAF] and go where the organisation goes." And the welfare work is done whether people have faith or not. "I am proud of my team and constantly hearing good things about them. One of the chaplains was recently successfully nominated for an OBE – for his work during the COVID-19 pandemic. He reached out particularly to single personnel locked down in their rooms – he set up weekly mailings, online games and discussions, and met people outside for an hour's exercise. It was miserable for most people, and he connected them."

The ethical and moral training pillar is most obvious at RAF College Cranwell and RAF Halton: "All new recruits receive a beliefs and values package that encourages them to think about whether different standards and norms apply now they are in the military, and what their motivation is. Away from initial training, that ethical advice includes having private conversations with any individual, including those in command. If they have difficult decisions to make or if there are personal matters that they are wrestling with, that's what we are there for."

Giles remembers seeing a person on their first day in Iraq who was asking: "What the blank blank are we doing here padre? They were struggling with the morality of being at war. I am not a pacifist. I believe there are times when the prosecution of lethal effect is the least worst thing we can do. The church needs to help people make those decisions, and to make the necessary things we have to do as reasonable as we can make them.

Work in the UK

On station, there are chaplaincy centres, but Giles emphasises the need for chaplains to be visible. "If you are invisible, you are anonymous; and if you are anonymous, you are irrelevant," he says. "Chaplains must get out there and be seen. You can't just sit in an office and expect people to come and see you. At Brize, we had an enormous board listing all the 50 or 60 sub >

A chaplain leads personnel from all three forces in a field service of Remembrance during an exercise in Oman

“The welfare work is done whether people have faith or not”

units which we marked each time we saw them. If we hadn't been to a squadron for two months, we'd go and visit them that day.

“You need to be comfortable just to get on with people straight away. If you're not able to do that you are going to struggle as a chaplain. You need the confidence to be able to just say hello and talk for a bit until you get to know someone... and until they get to know you. Then they and their families are more likely to realise you can help,” he says.

The chaplaincy centres are often co-located on stations with medical and other welfare services, such as the Hives. They work firmly within the Caldicott Principles on confidentiality for welfare. “We keep information separate and confidential,” says Giles. “But if someone comes to me about an issue, I can signpost them next door. Each station will have a monthly welfare meeting run by the personnel team that involves the doctor, the chaplain, etc – to make sure we are aware of people and that no one is falling through the gaps. It's usual for chaplains to work hand-in-glove with other teams.”

A diverse calling

The recent search for a non-religious pastoral officer for the RAF is part of the service's and the MOD's aims to promote a more diverse and inclusive culture, and ensure the armed forces better reflect the society they serve. An increasing number of people (in all three armed forces) say they have no religion: 38 per cent of regulars and 30 per cent of reserves in October 2023. The majority of RAF regulars who do express a religion are Christian (23,630 of approximately 30,000 people in the service in 2017) and the vast majority of those are Church of England (15,240). But there are increasing numbers of personnel who follow world faiths, and in 2018 the RAF saw its first non-Christian chaplains for decades pass out from RAF College Cranwell.

On his graduation that year as a reservist, Chaplain Ali Omar said: “My role in the RAF as a flagbearer of the Muslim chaplaincy will see me negotiate and establish the place of world faith chaplaincy in the RAF – an overdue and exciting



venture." Ali Omar is now a regular and was recently deployed to Qatar. Giles says: "He went for a few weeks when the RAF was responsible for air policing at the 2022 FIFA World Cup. He is usually based at Coningsby with 12 Squadron which is joint UK and Qatari personnel. His post shows we're open to meeting the religious and pastoral needs of all people. Also, they don't have a concept of chaplaincy in the Qatar Emiri Air Force, so this was a concept we could share with them as part of learning about each other's cultures." There are currently also commissioned chaplains serving who follow Sikh and Jewish faiths. Other, civil servant, chaplains represent the Hindu and Buddhist faiths.

Giles becomes even more enthusiastic when asked about female chaplains. "Guess when the RAF had its first woman chaplain?" he asks with a look of merry challenge in his eyes.

"1946! A minister called Elsie Chamberlain.

The Archbishop of Canterbury at the time was furious, as women were not close to being ordained in the Church of England. But she was a Congregational Church Minister, so he had no jurisdiction. The Army didn't have their first woman chaplain until the early 1990s and the Navy about 10 years later." The RAF currently has 10 female chaplains, but Giles says he wants to do better: "In the Church of England the ratio of men and women being ordained is about 50:50," he says. "I'd like to get towards that, but it might take a generation to achieve."

The Chaplain-in-Chief's clerical life before the RAF included time at a parish church, as well as ministry at a university. "I found I enjoyed the work when I was talking to people who didn't go to church every week, or even at all," he says. Now he regularly gets together with chaplains from universities, prisons and hospitals to share different ways of working: "I think the armed forces is only just catching up with multifaith chaplaincy in healthcare and universities. That's because our demographic is different – the RAF is still more male white Christian than the general population. So our chaplaincy hasn't had to morph until now."

Taking care

Friends in, for example, the Metropolitan Police chaplaincy allow Giles to "share the workload with somebody who both understands the world and is slightly different from it." In doing this he is following his own advice to his



Above: Chaplain in Chief and Archdeacon for the Royal Air Force The Venerable Doctor (Air Vice-Marshal) Giles Legood

Left, top: The first RAF Sikh Chaplain, Flight Lieutenant Mandeep Kaur, at the Central Gurdwara in Shepherd's Bush in 2021. She passed out from RAF College Cranwell alongside Muslim Padre, Chaplain (Flight Lieutenant) Ali Omar in 2018; the pair were two of five chaplains to graduate alongside 140 other officer cadets commissioning into a variety of branches following regular and reserve officer training

Centre: British Forces Cyprus Remembrance services at Happy Valley, Episkopi and RAF Akrotiri

Bottom: "We wear light blue." Chaplains have done the same training and service, and live the same forces life as all aviators

chaplains to take care of themselves. "If you fall over, then you can't be any use to anyone else," he says. "I want people to make sure they take their leave, and go on the spiritual retreats and professional development courses offered to them. Some people go to a monastery, attend a religious conference or walk to the top of a mountain. I like to have a series of quiet days at a nearby convent, and have also attended the International Military Pilgrimage in Lourdes."

It's rare for chaplains to get feedback on their work. "So much of chaplaincy is hidden anyway because some of it takes place privately with an individual," says Giles. "Sometimes you can unlock doors for people and sometimes you can use your weight as a chaplain to get things done. Other times you're just chatting to people and they're kind of unravelling what's going on in their brain, trying to take the knots out. You might see them once or twice, and never again. You don't know if it's worked, and that's just something you have to live with, I suppose."

"I guess the RAF is like that. In an army regiment you'll be with them forever; they'll move to a different country and you go with them. Whereas in the Air Force, people are doing two or three years here, and then you churn, and your colleague in the office next door, who you've only known for five minutes, gets posted somewhere else. That's just the nature of RAF life, really. You need to be resilient, and the chaplains are here to help people with that." **A**

PEOPLE POWER

When **Luke Delahunty** had a crash on his way to work at RAF Honington, his parents were told he may not last the night. He has gone on to lead a life of adventure and achievement and, he says, it's thanks to the support of those around him – and always saying 'Yes!'

An old friend of mine from the cadets said: 'You do more than I do and I'm not in a wheelchair,'" says Luke Delahunty. "And I laughed and said: 'Well, that's your fault. Life is what you make it, you know.'"

After leaving the RAF – following a near-fatal motorbike crash in 1996 – Luke has lived a life of adventure including winning a British gold medal, competing in the Invictus Games, cycling from London to Paris, teaching scuba diving in Egypt, sailing a tall ship in the Mediterranean and appearing on stage, in an opera and in a TV commercial.

"A vast majority of the things that I've done are through people that I've met," adds Luke. "People who told me about something that sounds amazing."

Despite the dizzying array of Luke's achievements, there is no sense of showing off. And as he says: "If I am not in a good place, other people are always the answer."

Luke was not particularly sporty as a child; he didn't really watch it, let alone compete much. He enjoyed playing Scrabble with his mum and joined the RAF Air Cadets because he thought: 'Why not?' when a friend joined up. But cadets engaged him enough to join the RAF at 17, as a gunner. He served in Germany, Northern Ireland and Cyprus with 1 Squadron RAF Regiment.

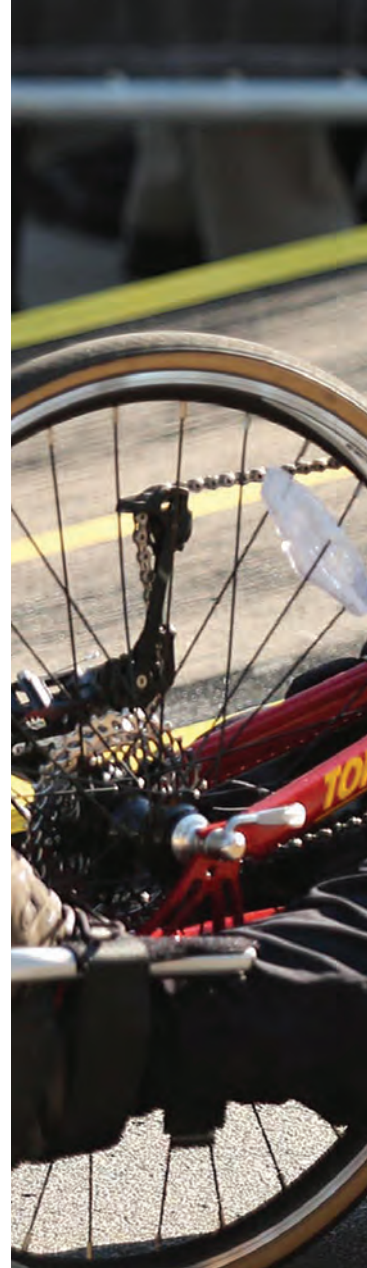
Eight years later, in 1996, on his commute to RAF Honington, he and a tractor collided. His injuries were life-threatening. He had to be resuscitated in the ambulance, and his family were told their 24-year-old son would probably not last the night.

But, somehow, he did. Luke spent the next year in hospital and at Headley Court, adapting to total paralysis from the chest down (T6). "I was lucky to survive it. That has always helped me to get through. I also broke my neck, but there was no damage to my spinal cord there. If there had been I would have lost the function in my arms. Pushing a wheelchair would have been very difficult and I would not have been as independent as I am now. My life could have ended or just been much worse; so I felt it was my duty to make the most of it."

"[Hospital] was only six miles away from RAF Honington so I still felt very connected to the RAF," he says. "A few people would come to visit me; like Regiment Warrant Officer, Pat Sweeney. At that time it wasn't clear what the prognosis was going to be," says Luke. "And he said no matter what happens, you're going be alright because you're Regiment-trained. At the time I thought what the hell are you talking about? But over the years I think, well, yeah, he was right. In the military we are trained: we'll never know where we are going to find ourselves, and wherever that is, we've got to make the most of it."

Making contact

After moving to the National Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville to continue his rehabilitation, Luke, by then 25, began to feel very detached. "Then one day a guy I'd served with in Germany came into the ward. He'd become a civilian paramedic. He said: 'I'd heard you'd had an accident. And I'd heard you were dead.' Once word got around that



Despite his lack of interest in sport in his early life, Luke has become a keen athlete since his accident, and has competed as a hand cyclist at two Invictus Games



I wasn't dead, a few people I'd served with came to visit. And one of the guys asked what I was doing the next night. 'Well, nothing; hospital,' I replied. He said they'd square it with the nurses and take me out for a drink. So they basically manhandled me into a Sherpa or whatever van it was and took me to the Rose and Crown near RAF Halton. There was a load of guys from 1 Squadron in the pub, because the Queen's Colour Squadron was there for some reason. Needless to say, I don't remember much about that night. At that time the internet wasn't a thing, social media wasn't a thing. That night out made me feel that people cared, wanted to see me, wanted to help me in their way."

Eventually, Luke moved to Uxbridge and got a job. He kept in touch with his squadron and

would have a few pints with them when he could. He lived in London for 12 years. When RAF Uxbridge closed down, social media was just starting up and he kept in touch that way.

New directions

Luke's accident had happened on his way to work, so counted as being on duty. He's grateful that meant he got a medical discharge and a war pension that kicked in immediately. "I was financially OK, but still wanted to do something. I still wanted to be active."

He went back to college and has had various paid jobs since, for News Quest Media, the NHS and as an actor. He began acting with B22, a theatre company for military veterans. From there he "randomly" ended up in an opera about military life, then got an agent >

"My life could have ended; so I felt it was my duty to make the most of it"

ACHIEVEMENTS

Invictus Games 2016
 Hand cycling – IHB 1 Men
 Hand Bike Race: 4th; IHB1
 Men Hand Bike Time Trial:
 7th.
 Rowing IR2 Men 4
 Minutes: 6th; IR2 Men 1
 Minute – 9th place
Invictus Games 2017
 Hand cycling: IHB1 Men
 Hand Bike Race: 6th; IBH
 Men Hand Bike Time Trial:
 6th
World record holder
 Part of a team of 100
 people in wheelchairs
 that pulled a 127.6 tonne
 787-9 Boeing Dreamliner
 over 100 metres in 2018,
 beating the previous
 record of 67 tonnes held
 by a Belgian team.
**British Indoor Rowing
 Championships**
 Gold medal (“but there’s
 a but....” says Luke. “We
 were the only all male
 adaptive team that year,
 so won the gold medal by
 default.”)
Soldiering On Awards
 People’s Choice winner
 2018

Below: Clinching the world record for a Boeing 787-pull by 100 wheelchair users at Heathrow airport



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and did a couple of TV adverts. He says: “I just said yes – as usual.” He’s also volunteered for the many charities that have helped, supported or inspired him: BLESMA, SSAFA, the RAF Benevolent Fund, The Jubilee Sailing Trust and The Back Up Trust. He’s currently a trustee at his local Association branch.

Sporting life

The Back Up Trust gets involved with people with spinal cord injuries. During rehabilitation, it introduced Luke to pool, table tennis, archery, wheelchair basketball and rugby, water skiing, sit skiing, rowing and hand cycling. “It was geared to opening your eyes up to what is possible in a wheelchair,” he says. “In the RAF I always applied for a sports parachute course, but never got onto it. So I did a [tandem] parachute jump after my injury. Also, it helped on the social side – with meeting other people with spinal cord injuries. We’ve all got similar experiences; you can chat much more easily about the more private things to do with your injury like bladder control, bowel control, all of those personal things that people don’t generally realise are affected. And it’s through chatting with other people like that that you realise you learn from others.”

“One of the first things I paid for out of my own pocket was learning to scuba dive,” he says. “As a fairly new wheelchair-user, you learn from other people. I got talking to a girl I’d met who was a diver and knew where to go in Egypt that was fully accessible. I went out

there, learned to scuba dive, and loved it. Later I qualified as an instructor and lived and taught in Egypt for a year.”

Luke had also done rowing taster days while in London – then trained on the water and in indoor adaptive events: “The boats had side floats, like stabilisers,” he smiles. Despite entering a few competitions, he became more involved in scuba diving and ignored messages asking if he’d like to take part in the Paralympics. It’s the only time in our interview when the man who always says yes mused about what might have been. “I don’t regret the choice I made, because I loved it [teaching scuba abroad], but I sometimes wondered what might have happened if I’d got into sports sooner after my injury.” In London he also bought himself a hand-cycle, though “I wasn’t confident enough to ride it a lot until I moved out to Aylesbury some years later.” After that he did the London-Paris fundraising cycle ride and other long rides two or three times on the hand bike, because: “a friend asked if I fancied it.”

Mutual support

His participation in the Invictus Games also came about after taking advantage of a chance encounter. Living in Aylesbury, he’d taken up wheelchair rugby at Stoke Mandeville, and was hand-cycling regularly. “I thought Invictus was for people who had served recently,” says Luke. “The Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. I’d been out of service for decades and also didn’t think my injuries qualified. I was at the pub one day in Stoke Mandeville, wearing an RAF Regiment t-shirt. The [UK] wheelchair archery team was there after training at Stoke Mandeville stadium. We got chatting. An Army major in the team gave me some contacts and she gave me the way to go forwards.”

Luke was selected to compete at Invictus in 2016 (Florida) and 2017 (Toronto) in the rowing and hand cycling events. In Florida he got personal bests in both events. “I was happy with that. It was the experience... coming out to compete through the dry ice to Led Zeppelin’s *Kashmir*...the crowd cheering and clapping. My stomach was churning. It was a magical moment. But what made it more special was that I was allowed to take a couple of people with me. They had been

AT HIS RAFA BRANCH

After moving hundreds of miles to his new home in Hampshire in July 2021 Luke met John Lawrence, the welfare officer of RAF Association Fareham Branch, as part of a welfare enquiry. "John told me about the social events and asked if I was a member?" After just moving areas, Luke thought, "I don't know anyone, so it's going to help me build my life here" and, after many years being aware of its work, he joined the Association. The first social trip was to the National Air Traffic Centre at Swanwick where he met Flight Sergeant Paul Rigby who was on the committee of the branch but likely to be deployed very soon. Paul said they were looking for a new chairman. "Why not, right?" thought Luke and after some research he stepped up to the post. He's being supported by Paul Rigby and the many other branch trustees. "I'm still learning. I've never done anything like this before. But we are talking about making our social media better, planning our big summer events, and thinking about how we can involve our members on the Isle of Wight more – we want them to know we haven't forgotten about them. And I do think it's kind of funny that I am a chairperson in a chair."

From top: Getting involved in acting and in resilience projects; Luke qualified as a diving instructor and lived and taught in Egypt for a year; serving with the RAF Regiment




"The more you say yes to things... then you never know where it's going to take you"

there for me when I was low, and weren't in a great place in their personal lives; I thought; 'You know, we can help each other' and I invited them along."

Luke says he's needed most support when relationships ended. A couple of friends he'd also wanted to invite to Invictus Florida had helped him through a breakup – they had phoned every day from Orkney to chat and check he was OK. "They were there for me – not physically, but they were there for me." And during lockdown when another relationship didn't make it through the enforced separation: "I was in an online meeting for a resilience project I was involved in. The host took time to ask how each of the 15 participants was. And I just burst into tears and there was a stunned silence, you know, and a second later, everyone was like: 'Oh! Are you OK?' After the meeting my phone just kept ringing with people from the session calling me. And one of them only lived 45 minutes away and she delivered pizza and wine. And



you know, that's just what I needed – just a person to be there for me."

"The more things you do, the more people you meet and the more opportunities come along and then it just becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy almost, because the more you say yes to things...then you never know where it's going to take you or who you are going to meet or what's going to come from it. And so that's how I live my life, just saying yes and doing stuff." 

FIGHTING FATE



In the skies over Europe during WWII, the survival of every airman was determined as much by luck as by skill. **Professor Paul MacKenzie** explores some of the superstitions followed by RAF aircrew in an attempt to even the odds



At first glance it may seem surprising that wartime flyers engaged in ‘magical’ thinking – or the belief that ritual acts or charmed objects could affect events beyond their control. After all, airmen generally came from among the more highly educated segments of the population, and multiple investigations have shown that in the modern world it is the least well-educated who tend to be the most superstitious.

However, there are situations in which rational analysis takes a back seat to irrational behaviour even among the best and the brightest; specifically in life-or-death situations where those involved feel they lack control over their destiny. This was the case for many of those who flew wartime operations in the Royal Air Force.

From virtually the first day of the war to the last it was obvious to RAF aircrew that the enemy were doing their best to kill them. As aerial combat continued, the odds against survival tended to shorten.

Tour limits were set on the number of flying hours or sorties an individual would have to endure. But this did not obscure that fact that flak and fighters could pose a deadly threat on almost every operation. For those inclined to do the calculations, it was evident that the likelihood of being shot down during a tour was often statistically greater than making it through unscathed.

The sense of youthful invulnerability and self-confidence among highly trained wartime aircrew tended to erode as it became clear that even the most competent and admired among their fellows were being downed by the enemy.

This was where magical thinking entered the picture. If expertise and skill were not decisive factors, then death or survival could seem mostly a matter of luck. When fate seemed arbitrary, solo pilots or whole crew often tried to impose some control by resorting to superstition.

Evening the odds

Already accustomed to preflight tests of their equipment, aircrew did not find it too hard to add ritualistic actions to their checklists. These varied tremendously, but often involved a >

strong sense that survival depended on doing exactly the same things in the same order as on an initial successful sortie; however inconsequential this might seem.

Klaus Adam, flying Typhoons, always turned the signet ring his parents had given him three times before taking off, while Spitfire pilot Bob Spurdle purposely fiddled with his scarf in a particular manner, without fail, before starting up.

There were also rituals that were common to entire crews, particularly in Bomber Command squadrons; above all the habit of urinating on the tailwheel "for luck" before clambering aboard, as Lancaster pilot Peter Russell put it.

At least as common was the adoption of special charms. Some popular good-luck items, such as rabbits' feet and replica horseshoes, had a longstanding talismanic history. But just about anything, from small trinkets and soft toys to individual pieces of clothing or headgear, could come to embody good fortune in the mind of the possessor, not least if he had received it as a gift.

Doug Newham DFC, air observer and navigator on Wellingtons and Halifaxes, recalled that: "A pair of the notorious WAAF heavyweight underwear – the chastity-enhancing, unassailable and unglamorous black knickers known as 'blackouts' – would regularly appear in my Halifax bomber. While never seen on test or local flights, they were always there on operational missions, hung in the wireless operator's compartment. Were they his lucky charm? His talisman? We all respected each



"From small trinkets and soft toys to individual pieces of clothing or headgear"

other's foibles in such matters, and I never asked him. Perhaps they were a kind WAAF's way of wishing him good luck and a safe return. Regardless of their origins, in that respect they worked a charm!"

Hurricane fighter pilot John Ellis always wore a small boomerang pendant sent by a favourite aunt, and Lancaster gunner Bob Pierson stuffed a knitted doll in his tunic while on ops, given to him by the daughter of a friendly publican.

Individual charms might also be adopted by a crew, such as the stuffed panda always stowed aboard the Lancaster flown by Joe MacCarthy. Quite a few men carried more than one charm to further boost their survival chances, such as Lancaster bomb aimer Les Bartlett. He wore a chain from which hung not only a rabbit's foot but also a silver thrupenny bit, a Lincoln imp, and a Cornish pixie.

"For us, having our lucky charms with us was as important as having ammunition for the guns or fuel for the engines," recalled wireless operator Reg Payne, who flew in Lancasters with 50 Squadron. "[They gave us] something that would help us survive the terror we faced every time we took off to battle with fighters, searchlights, flak, mechanical failure, collision, bombs from above, even the weather, and all in an aircraft packed with high explosives, incendiaries, ammunition, petrol and electric sparks. In these circumstances charms, mascots and rituals were all immensely important to each individual, often to the point of obsession. And to each crew as a whole; bad luck for one was likely to be bad luck for all."

Alongside superstitious actions aimed at bringing good fortune, efforts were made to avoid the opposite. Things traditionally considered unlucky, such as occupying the bed of the recently deceased or wearing a piece of dead man's clothing on operations, were to be avoided.

"Nothing would have made us sleep in those beds," observed Wellington navigator Arthur Hoyle. Lancaster bomb aimer Miles Tripp would



Above: Gremlins were fictitious devilish spirits which first appeared in the RAF during WWII. A variety of aircraft malfunctions would be blamed upon the work of malicious gremlins. Airmen would combat this by carrying mascots of lucky ones, such as this, carried by Flight Lieutenant Gerard Lewis DFC (© RAF Museum)

Left: Artwork from a personalised wartime RAF life jacket. Black cats were popular choices as mascots due to their reputation for bringing good luck (© RAF Museum)



never wear a fur-lined jacket that had belonged to an airman killed in action except while on the ground. It could also be seen as tempting fate to have a crew photo taken before the end of a tour.

Occasionally airmen would thumb their noses at superstition by embracing traditionally unlucky symbols, such as broken mirrors or the number 13, but this kind of overt disdain was rare.

Jinxes and Jonahs

Specific aircraft might acquire the reputation of being unlucky. If it seemed that aircraft painted with certain identification letters were less likely to return than others, then aircraft with these letters were avoided. Likewise, to circumvent the unlucky 13th operation, superstitious flyers would often label it 12B in their logbooks. Attempts were also made to infuse an aircraft with good fortune by painting a lucky symbol somewhere on its exterior.

“Our surefire method of warding off all evils, especially flak

Above: Modern replica of the wartime Halifax ‘Friday the 13th’, based at Yorkshire Air Museum

Right: When flying through flak, survival could seem mostly a matter of luck. This American B-17 received a direct hit over Yugoslavia

Below: The original design of the aircrew brevet for air gunners had 13 feathers, but this was reduced to 12 to avoid bad luck (© RAF Museum)



Photo © IWM

and fighters, rested in the person of [navigator] Jack Walton,” remembered B.G. MacDonald, a wireless operator and air gunner with 103 Squadron. “We insisted that he board H-Harry for ops in full officer’s uniform; no battledress allowed. It had to include flat hat, white shirt and black tie. The rest of us climbed into the kite in all manner of sloppy attire, but Jack had to be immaculate.”

In contrast, if certain people became associated with bad outcomes they were often shunned. This was particularly true of young women, including members of the Women’s >





Photo © IWM

Left: Laughing in the face of superstition, this Hurricane pilot's 'coat of arms' incorporated several unlucky signs: the number 13; a broken mirror; walking under a ladder; and three cigarettes lit with one match
Right: Occupying the bed of a recently deceased airman was to be avoided
Below: Percy the penguin, mascot of bomb aimer Stan Chapman. When Stan baled out of his Halifax and was taken prisoner, Percy was confiscated. Later Stan's captors returned Percy, and the two returned home at the war's end (© RAF Museum)



Photo © IWM

“For us, having our lucky charms with us was as important as having ammunition for the guns or fuel for the engines”

Auxiliary Air Force. Any woman who had the misfortune of going out with more than one RAF airmen who failed to return from operations was dubbed a ‘chop girl’, and avoided thereafter.

Just how prevalent superstition was among wartime aircrew is difficult to say. No studies of the phenomenon were undertaken at the time and, among those who survived, opinions varied wildly. Those who admitted to superstitions tended to argue that it was quite common, while those who avoided magical thinking often claimed it was quite rare.

The frequency with which the subject comes up in various personal accounts does indicate that superstition was a significant feature of life on operations. Even those who flew aboard a Halifax bomber named ‘Friday the 13th’ might find themselves beginning to believe it



bore a charmed life; as it did, surviving to the end of the war.

For those RAF aircrew who did resort to magical thinking, their level of faith in the supernatural could be quite strong. Crews could insist that one among their number stop seeing a chop girl, for instance, or delay a scheduled take-off to allow a crew member to retrieve forgotten charms or engage in missed rituals.

What also seems clear is that superstition was generally more common among bomber crews than among fighter pilots, most likely a result of their differing situations. When confronted with flak and fighters, fighter pilots could evade and engage, relying on their skill to be masters of their own fate. Life aboard a bomber, however, often meant flying straight and level, and taking whatever was thrown at you.

There is a paradox surrounding those who tried to increase their odds of survival through superstitious acts. Practically, magical thinking did nothing to aid survival. Yet indirectly it may have helped aircrew to believe that they had a greater control over their fate. As modern studies of superstitions among athletes show, the resulting self-confidence can boost performance.

Something similar may well have been true for wartime aircrew. As 50 Squadron's Reg Payne stated: “Whether these mascots really worked doesn't matter...what did matter is that we believed in them. They gave to each of us as individuals something that we clung to, something that we believed would keep us safe, that would bring us back each time.” **A**

*S. P. MacKenzie is a professor in the Department of History at the University of South Carolina. He is the author of **Flying Against Fate: Superstition and Allied Aircrews in World War II**. For more on this book see p.59.*

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“You could see landing craft go up in smoke”

Bernard Morgan was an RAF code and cipher operator, who witnessed the D-Day landings on Gold Beach just days before going ashore himself. He celebrated his 100th birthday in February, but still remembers what it was like as a 20-year-old, going into battle during Operation Neptune, 80 years ago

OPERATION NEPTUNE was launched on 6 June 1944 (D-Day). A 1,200-aircraft airborne assault preceded an amphibious assault involving more than 5,000 vessels. Nearly 160,000 troops crossed the English Channel on 6 June in what was the largest seaborne invasion in history. Operation Neptune was part of Operation Overlord, the battle of Normandy.

Top: Bernard Morgan celebrated his 100th birthday in February. Until recently, he regularly visited the Normandy beaches with his daughter Sheila, to commemorate the operations and pay tribute to colleagues who died there

The night before D-Day, Bernard was anchored seven miles off the Normandy Coast. “I was the youngest RAF Sergeant there. I had to man a Bren Gun on the landing craft. I was frightened to death. It was 25 miles long...the area for the beaches...and they were firing from the Atlantic Wall. And our battleships were behind us, firing back. And I was under this canopy for two hours. When you looked down the line, you could see landing craft go up in smoke. The shells from the Atlantic Wall had not been made to fire the ten miles to the battleships. They were dropping short on the landing craft. Of course all the landing craft were full of troops with ammunition that went up in smoke. You’re looking down the line, wondering is it my landing craft that’s going to be the next one?”

Bernard was part of 83 Group Control Centre, in the 2nd Tactical Air Force. He operated a highly classified Typex machine, to be used to direct aircraft over Normandy in Operation Overlord. For the first three days after D-Day, he was moored a few hundred yards off the beach, waiting for the order to advance. On 8 June, the machine was transported onto land on a Bedford truck, which would then be used to power it.

“It was a very heavy machine...on a wooden base and it took four men to lift it. In the cipher vehicle, which was like a mobile classroom, we had two of these; one set up for the current day, and one for the day before.” If the machine was captured, Bernard’s orders were: “Everything



would have to be destroyed. Your code book with all the codes in, the Typex machine, everything would have to be destroyed.

“When you come off the landing craft, the lane for you to follow is marked with white tape, by the military police. Then you are directed to an assembly point.” It was on the beach that 20-year-old Bernard saw his first dead bodies. He particularly remembers an incident later, inland, with one of the wireless operators in his unit: “[The Allies] were firing at low-flying aircraft, but we’d got the guns set too low. And [a bullet] went through the vehicle the wireless operator was in and straight through the poor lad. Killed him off. The other two were killed by Teller mines, which the Germans dropped. When they hit the ground, they spread out. And these two lads were on a forward direction post and a Teller mine was dropped and killed two of them.”

Looking back, Bernard said: “When you were in the service, you thought you were doing your little bit towards helping win the war. When World War II finished, we were hoping that would be the end of wars. But unfortunately it was not.”

Bernard served until VE Day in 1945, in France and Germany. He was then posted to Japan, but VJ Day was declared before he got there. He has been back to Normandy many times and always goes to the graves of the three wireless operators from his unit. He likes to think that young people remember the sailors, soldiers, airmen and civilians who gave their lives for the freedom that we enjoy today. **A**

D-Day stories from the archive



Allied naval craft
off the Normandy
beaches, 6 June 1944

6 June 1944, as remembered by Paul Lambermont, a Free French flier with the RAF who later joined the Association's Paris Branch

"The 1am briefing: Operating in pairs, at 10-minute intervals, the Bostons of 88 Squadron were to lay a smoke screen between the vessels of the Royal Navy, the US Navy and the famous Atlantic Wall.

"Then came practical advice. To be effective the screen must start at the level of the waves. When you lay the screen turn your oxygen on full. It's unwise to breathe in any of the smoke that might get forced back into the aircraft.

"At 3am I was completely ready. I went back to my Nissen hut, going over the points in the briefing. I didn't sleep a wink.

"Twenty minutes after the 6am take-off we reached the sea. As far as the eye could see there were craft of every kind – an incredible criss-cross of funnels, masts and tiny balloons kissing the clouds.

"Suddenly we saw France, right ahead, standing out of the water. As we turned, every gun in every battery on the Atlantic Wall was firing all out. The American vessels facing them followed suit.

"Visibility – roughly eight miles – was better than our briefing had led us to expect. In a few minutes we'd have to get in between the two opposing sides. I adjusted my oxygen mask.

"The time had come. I pressed the bomb-release button and a miracle happened. An endless stream of thick whitish smoke belched out behind the Boston, now doing 260mph. The wireless operator shouted: 'Bang on.' For a few moments the screen, eight miles long, hid the American armada. When the four containers were empty, I gave the pilot the route back and let out a long 'phew' of content. At 7.30am, our Boston touched down at Hertford Bridge. By 8am all the others should have been back."




Troops board their Horsa glider on
the evening of 6 June 1944

"We were there too" – an anonymous WAAF's story told to Air Mail in 1994
"So often I would like to say we also were there. True, not for everyone the glamour of operations rooms. Some had to do the mundane tasks, or were hidden away in signals sections below ground. None of the excitement of plotting for us, only hours of monitoring the dots and dashes. Nevertheless, we listened to them go, rejoiced at their return, mourned the losses. We counted the tugs and gliders leaving for D-Day – and before. We counted the tugs returning. When the last glider pilot returned safely we witnessed them stripping their lead officer, for 'good luck tokens' they said! That officer surely recalls the day he stood naked but for a severed tie, a fire extinguisher under each arm, spraying foam over his 'attackers'."



"The invasion started at Down Ampney" – Alan Hartley's memories of Dakotas on D-Day and after, published in Air Mail in 2002

"At the end of May an order came confining us to camp. The phonebox was sealed, all letters left open for the censors and all leave cancelled. Then came the order on 4 June to paint black and white stripes round the fuselage and wings of all our Dakotas and Horsa gliders to help our anti-aircraft gunners on D-Day. Our Dakotas had actually flown the night before to drop gliders and paras on crossroads, bridges and gun batteries, so, in effect, the invasion started at Down Ampney.

"Four days after the invasion our Dakotas made their first landings on French soil, taking vital supplies. Once emptied the Dakotas were then fitted with stretcher racks and we brought back our first casualties, who were cared for by a lone WAAF nursing orderly. The only WAAFs to fly operationally, they were given parachutes, however, once casualties were loaded, they were forbidden to use them, as their casualties did not have chutes. Our Dakotas were not permitted to display a Red Cross, so they were fair game for the German fighters. Nursing orderlies on our Dakotas brought back over 100,000 casualties. It was not unusual for a soldier wounded in France to be on the operating tables at Down Ampney in under three hours – a record we are justly proud of." 

“We felt the impact of the explosion”

Jay Tailor recalls a night in Basra under constant rocket attack



WARRANT OFFICER JAY TAILOR served in Basra from March to July 2008, and has been deployed around the world in various administrative positions. He is due to retire from the RAF as Warrant Officer in May 2024 after 36-and-a-half years in service. He has been an Association RAFALO of the year and is a member of Woodbridge RMG.

Top right: A Counter-Rocket, Artillery, and Mortar (C-RAM) weapons system in action. It is able to acquire its own targets and fire 4,500 rounds per minute
© Public domain

I WAS in Basra during 2008, working in the admin office. Often, I would work the night shift to document arrivals and departures from the airfield. Flights had to be made under cover of darkness, as aircraft made for easy targets during the day.

Darkness was also when most attacks on the base came. Insurgents would set up rockets during the day, point them at the airfield then set the timer and disappear.

I knew the dangers before arriving in Basra as I'd spoken to my predecessor in the admin office, and on the day I arrived an RAF sergeant had been killed by incoming fire. We were all briefed on what to do when hearing the siren, and got used to having our helmet and body armour within reach.

One particular night I was on shift with Dave, a British Army lance corporal. We were processing departures when the alarm sounded. We were in a portacabin, so quickly put on our armour, left the cabin and lay face down on the tarmac outside as protocol demanded.

The C-RAM base defences sent long bursts of bright gunfire into the night's sky to intercept the rockets, but their sheer number meant that many still got through. We could feel them hitting the ground around us; some extremely close by. There would be the occasional lull, then, just as the all-clear would sound, more rockets would arrive. It was continuous.

I could see Dave becoming agitated, and as a sergeant it was my duty to help. I reached out and patted his helmet, saying: “Dave, I’m here, mate. I’m here with you. It’s OK, we’ll be OK.”

“I don’t like this,” he replied, shaking. “I need to get out of this.”



“No, we have to stay here,” I said. “We don’t move. Belt-buckle on the tarmac is the safest option”.

As I spoke, a rocket landed very close by. The sound was tremendous. We felt the impact of the explosion then the debris flooding onto us – shrapnel, dirt and tarmac.

“They’re getting closer!” said Dave, close to panic. So I kept talking, keeping him calm.

The volume of incoming definitely made it the worst night that I experienced during my tour. Time and again a lull would be followed by another round of explosions across the base.

When the all-clear finally sounded my first thoughts were for Dave. We sat up, and he grabbed his cigarettes while I passed him a bottle of water. After a few moments I decided to focus his mind elsewhere.

“Come on,” I said. “Let’s start the post-attack procedures.” So we walked around our cabin checking for any casualties, damage or unexploded rockets. After that we went back inside and I made us some tea, spooning extra sugars into Dave’s. We had a chat and, as his adrenaline had been going non-stop, I told him to have a power nap to calm down before continuing the shift. After that he was fine.

I was fine too. While the attack had been prolonged and very close, looking after Dave gave me something to focus on, which in turn helped me to cope with everything that was happening. Being able to help someone in a situation like that is one of my proudest achievements.

ALRESFORD AND DISTRICT BRANCH

A visit to the FAST Museum in Farnborough



© Google

In November, the branch visited the Farnborough Air Sciences Trust Museum. A tour was led by Richard Hall, owner of the English Electric/BAC Lighting T.5 on display at the museum. Branch members had an interesting and educational day, with some scaling the ladder to take a seat in the cockpit.

Another trip took place in December, when RAFALO Paul Rigby offered members of Alresford and District and Basingstoke branches the opportunity to visit NATS (National Air Traffic Services). Members learned about the important work carried out by the RAF at this state-of-the-art facility.

CALNE AND DISTRICT BRANCH

Remembering the fallen

A fundraising Remembrance ball was held in November, where 170 guests enjoyed a black-tie evening of games, an auction and disco. Branch members attended the RBL Festival of Remembrance in the Royal Albert Hall, where the Association's national standard was also paraded. Members also marched at the Cenotaph. The branch standard was out on Remembrance Sunday as well as at events during the preceding week.

York Branch raises £20,000 for Wings Appeal



In 2023 the branch collected more than £20,000 for the Wings Appeal. As part of the welfare and wellbeing programme, several evening and daytime events took place at the branch club, including a dining-in night, a Christmas lunch and draw, and monthly film shows. Members also took part in the various Remembrance ceremonies and parades around York in November.

IN BRIEF



Armourers Branch

Over Christmas the branch provided festive boxes to armourers deployed around the globe on operational duties. They contained the chairman's festive greeting and thank you note, plus Christmas puddings, custard and items that appeal to armourers' sense of humour. Also inside were 'welfare tokens', which contained the email address and telephone number of the branch's welfare officer.

Coningsby and District Branch

At the RAF Coningsby Remembrance service, Ted Burrows laid a wreath on behalf of the branch and the standard was paraded by Howard Rolfe.

Diss and District Branch

Sixty-three members and guests attended the branch's Christmas lunch, including Association President Air Marshal Sir Baz North and Lady North. The afternoon consisted of a meal, with inter-table quiz, party games, raffle and auction. It also saw the presentation of several awards, including a National Presidential Certificate and badge to branch Vice Chairman Peter Moralee.



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BRANCH NEWS TIPS

Learn more about the kinds of branch news we'd like to publish, as well as a few extra tips, by downloading the guide from the Members' Portal at: rafa.org.uk/branchtips

FORMBY BRANCH

Helping to tell the story of the Lancaster bomber



In January, the branch donated £10,000 to the efforts to transform Rothbury House into community housing

for RAF veterans. It has also recently been involved in the Paper My Wishes exhibition, which includes a paper

sculpture of the central section of a Lancaster bomber. The work tells the story of WWII's Bomber Command, and the sculpture is covered in copies of donated ephemera relating to those who served. Starting at The Atkinson in Southport, the exhibition travelled the country, ending up at the International Bomber Command Centre, Lincolnshire.

BRISTOL BRANCH



Veterans from Bristol Branch celebrated

In November, branch secretary Tony Peters attended His Majesty The King's birthday party at Highgrove House. Born in the same year as the King, Tony received the invitation because of the voluntary work he does for Bristol Branch and other organisations. At Christmas, Eddie Starns enjoyed his third festive lunch with the branch since first

attending a veterans' lunch in 2021. Eddie, now in his 90s, served as a National Service medic from 1950 to 1954. At the veterans' lunch Eddie addressed his fellow diners to explain how the RAF Association and the RAF Benevolent Fund had helped him in his time of need, and stated how grateful he was to be a regular attendee at branch lunches.

A Send your branch news to us!
We welcome all submissions for Branch News, preferably by email to airmail@rafa.org.uk. Word count should be no more than 100 words. You may submit one accompanying photograph. If sent via email, please attach as a separate image file and at a size of at least 1MB and 300dpi. Send postal submissions to the address on page 3. Unfortunately photographs sent by post cannot be returned. Low-quality pictures may not be

published. Submission does not guarantee inclusion and where there are too many reports for an issue, the editor reserves the right to edit. Where the number of submissions exceeds the space available, preference will be given to news over photographs. Only submissions made by email will be acknowledged before publication.

The deadline for inclusion in the next issue is 3 May 2024.

IN BRIEF

Waddington Branch

In January, the branch's lunch club met at Sessions Restaurant in Lincoln, the teaching outlet of Lincoln College. The restaurant is run entirely by catering students, which allowed the branch to save on costs while also offering youngsters in the local community the chance to get some hands-on catering and hospitality experience. Group Captain Dominic 'Dutch' Holland OBE, Station Commander of RAF Waddington, joined branch members for the meal.

Yeadon Branch

The branch held a successful community bonfire and firework event in November, resulting in new members and funds raised. The branch has laid on numerous Brew for the Few coffee mornings for RAF veterans and their families, and continues to support local welfare cases. The annual Christmas draw raffle raised £970 for the Wings Appeal, with the main prize being a flight in a light aircraft. The branch also received £750 for the Wings Appeal from the Yeadon Carnival. More recently, a Burns Night celebration was held to bring branch members together.



The RAF Association is proud of the amazing welfare and wellbeing work of its branches, RMGs and branch clubs, and wants to continue working with its network of volunteers to support the wider RAF community. To find out about the support available, download the branch wellbeing activities guide from the Members' Portal at: rafa.org.uk/branchwellbeing

IN BRIEF

King's Lynn and District Branch

The branch continues with its social activities to help connect members, and recently arranged a visit to RAF Bircham Newton Heritage Museum – which conserves and displays memorabilia of the former RAF station and its satellite airfields. The visit was followed by the branch's monthly lunch meeting.

Newark and District Branch

Thirty-five members attended a Christmas lunch, and the branch sent more than £4,000 to RAF Association Headquarters as part of the Wings Appeal.



Northumbria Branch

Northumbria Branch covers a very large area of north-east England, and is keen to reach as many of its members as possible. The branch is based in Rothbury, which is too far for many members to reach to attend meetings and events, so a Facebook group has been created to encourage members to stay up-to-date and in touch online. To join, search Facebook for 'RAFA Northumbria Branch'.

RYEDALE BRANCH



Contributing to the activities in Whitby's contact house

Branch members visited an RAF contact house in Whitby to present a large collection of games, jigsaw puzzles and kitchen equipment that will enhance the facilities for personnel and families staying there. Personnel from nearby RAF Fylingdales welcomed the group, and explained how the house is used to provide welfare breaks and accommodation for visiting family members. Branch members were inspired to see how funds raised are being used locally for the wellbeing of the RAF community and were able to meet station family members who have benefited from the contact house.

BARRY AND THE VALE BRANCH

85th anniversary celebrations

Senedd Member Jane Hutt presented the branch with its 85th anniversary certificate in November 2023. The presentation took place at a performance by the RAF Central Band at the Pierhead Building, Cardiff Bay, attended by veterans' groups, serving personnel, and civic and military dignitaries.



Carrickfergus Branch right on par

Thanks to the aid of the Dambusters Golf Society (Carrick Golf Club), the branch received a cheque for £300 towards its 2024 Wings Appeal campaign. Members of the society raised the money by staging a variety of charitable competitions throughout the year. Society President, Michael McGivern, said: “The branch holds



its monthly meetings...and many of its social gatherings such as quizzes, musical evenings and dinners in our club, so it made sense to support this very local charity.”

MID-SOMERSET BRANCH

Reaching out in the winter

Attendees at the Mid-Somerset branch’s pre-Christmas lunch included a 101-year-old veteran, Dick Froom. Branch funds benefited from the raffle and the auctioning of an original painting by former chairman Paul Branson. In January the branch enjoyed a presentation by member and former airline pilot Dave



Willmott, which focused on his experiences with the Avro Tudor aircraft and support for the UK nuclear tests on Christmas Island in 1957. The airline pilot, who has 26,000 logged hours, enlivened proceedings with informative and amusing anecdotes.

HUYTON WITH ROBY AND LIVERPOOL BRANCH

Saying thank you to a charity champion

In recognition of the generous service given to the Association by ASDA Walton Superstore’s charity champion, Lorraine Ambrose, the branch presented her with a certificate and bouquet of



flowers. During her 23 years with ASDA, Lorraine has been a great friend and supporter of the Association and has helped the branch to raise thousands of pounds in store for the Wings Appeal.

IN BRIEF



Sud-Ouest Branch

The branch has joined with the Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club in north-west Charente Maritime in France to host a monthly English breakfast for members and veterans. Each breakfast is usually attended by 25 to 30 people, who have the opportunity to connect with friends old and new while enjoying their traditional English food.

Thetford and District Branch

To commemorate the Czechoslovakian and Polish airmen buried in the Commonwealth War Graves plot at St Ethelbert’s Church, the branch held its 20th annual service at the East Wretham memorial. The service also remembered those who served and died from the 359th Fighter Group who operated from RAF Wretham from 1943 to 1945. Many civic and military dignitaries also attended the event.

“The camp was divided into black and white areas”

Ralph Ottey on his wartime voyage from Jamaica to the UK



RALPH OTTEY joined the RAF in 1944 and is now 100 years old. After going home to Jamaica post-war, he soon returned to the UK to marry his girlfriend. He settled in Boston, Lincolnshire, and is a member of the Association's Boston Branch. *Air Mail* is indebted to **theforgotten generations.com** for conducting this interview.

I WAS a pupil-teacher in Jamaica when I took the RAF exam aged 19. Winston Churchill inspired me to join; I followed all his speeches and can still recite some from memory.

I was selected to be a wireless operator/air gunner because of my good English, and I went to Port Royal. This was 1944. A lot of others from all over the British West Indies joined us there.

A ship took us to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia, America. That was the first time I encountered racial discrimination. The camp was divided into black and white areas but, as we were RAF, we were designated as ‘honorary whites’, and weren’t allowed anywhere near the areas designated for black American servicemen. They even paid us the same as the white Americans, so I was loaded with money.

Soon after, we crossed the Atlantic. When we arrived in Liverpool we were met by a white West Indian admiral. The first thing he asked was whether George Headley, the West Indies cricketer, was among us.

We went to Filey in Yorkshire for initial training. In the evenings we would play cricket and, as we started, thousands of aircraft would fly overhead, and would still be going by the time we finished. All were heading to France as part of the invasion.

It was at Filey that I was reclassified as a motor transport driver. I was disappointed as I wanted to shoot down German aircraft, not drive a tanker. I took a 14-week course and when we finished I could drive anything from Coles cranes to Bren gun carriers

I was posted to Lincolnshire and became the personal chauffeur of 617 Squadron’s chief technical officer. In my down-time while waiting for the boss I was able to start a correspondence course in bookkeeping and accountancy.

The war in Europe ended a year after I joined the RAF. I was sent on a course to recognise



Japanese aircraft, as the grapevine said that 617 Squadron was being sent to Okinawa. While on the course I heard the atom bomb had been dropped, so that was scrubbed. I was so young and foolish that I felt disappointed I wouldn’t go.

I was offered a 15-month scholarship to finish my studies. It was a programme set up for ex-servicemen, and the RAF paid for the course plus my wages and accommodation. I came second out of 20 students, despite missing the final day’s exam because I was late back from Boston after seeing my girlfriend – who later became my wife.

In 1948 I went back home to Jamaica on the Windrush, via West Africa and Trinidad. In Trinidad we tried to get into a club but were told it was members only. When we asked to join, the doorman said it was exclusively for white American soldiers. So of course we pushed past him, and inside was full of white Americans and black Trinidadian woman. Sensing trouble, an officer asked what unit we were from. “We are members of the Royal Air Force,” we replied indignantly, “and we want a drink.” After that they made us their guests, and we didn’t have to pay for anything!

Top right: The Blue Plaque unveiled in 2023

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“Did I get the bloody shot?”

Lee ‘Matty’ Matthews on the work behind an award-winning photograph



SERGEANT MATTY MATTHEWS is an Instructor at the Defence School of Photography at RAF Cosford. He joined the RAF in 2007 and is a member of the Association’s HQ Branch.

IT TOOK MONTHS of preparation and planning to get the shot. It’s not just simply turning up and capturing it on the spot. I was photographing a parachutist, and when they come into the drop zone anything can change. For example, if the wind is blowing in a certain direction, they have to land in a certain direction.

We planned to capture this shot in Switzerland with the RAF Falcons Parachute Display Team. I was on the ground and the parachutists were jumping about 8,000 feet above the Swiss Alps. The Falcons were briefed on the ground as well, so they knew who should be where.

We also planned it so that one of the team would come in to land facing the sun. There was no wind, so it meant he could swoop over me with his smokes on. We pinpointed exactly where he was going to be, and I placed myself where I needed to be.

As a safety precaution we had signals to communicate with each other in case I was in the wrong position, but he came in exactly where we needed him to be; exactly where I was. Due to how much planning we’d done for this we thankfully got it bang on.

Obviously, my next thought was: “Did I get the bloody shot?” When I checked the camera I was relieved to see I had. It was an awesome feeling, and worth all the time spent planning.

The parachutist was wearing a helmet camera, so afterwards I was able to see the jump from his perspective. As he comes in to land you can see just how close to me he came to allow me to get the shot, and just how fast he was going.

If I hadn’t got the photo we would have probably retried on another parachute jump. But as this was our last day in Switzerland, and the



Falcons’ final jump, it was our one chance to get the shot with those incredible mountains as the backdrop. So, while we could have tried again at a later date, it would never have been the same.

I was delighted when the image won the RAF Photographic Competition’s personnel category. I’ve submitted stills and video to the competition every year since I joined the RAF in 2007, and won some. It’s a great way of celebrating the achievements of RAF photographers, and all getting together to share imagery and video.

I love aircraft and what they do; that’s been in my blood since I was young. My grandfather used to live at RAF Fairford and I’d go onto the base with the Americans and watch the B1, B2 and B52 aircraft coming in to land. I was given a camera at an early age and things just grew from there.

Photography to me is everything. It’s what I’ve grown up with. It gives me the chance to capture memories then look back at them. It’s a passion. I love my job; I love being a photographer.

See *Matty’s award-winning photograph ‘The Shot’* on pages 4 and 5 of this issue.



Your stories

Want to share a story from your own RAF service? Email airmail@rafa.org.uk or write to the HQ address on p3.

Top right: The ground isn’t the only place from which Matty has photographed the Falcons. This shot was taken from the ramp of a Hercules over Oxfordshire during training © MOD/Crown

letters

● **IN THIS SECTION** Share your stories, memories and thoughts with your fellow members



Araldite's alright

During my formative years, there was one particular incident that taught me a lot about RAF engineers. After a week's travelling, and at enormous expense and effort, the replacement engine door for a grounded Vulcan finally arrived at RAAF Darwin. As 617 Squadron's Detachment Supply Officer I was determined to present it in person to the aircraft's maintenance crew. Clambering into the cab of the flatbed truck alongside the driver, we set off with our cargo. When we arrived, a chief technician and sergeant emerged from the crew room. The large plywood lid was

removed, and the technician leaned over the complex piece of fuselage inside. Taking out a penknife he scratched away at the paint on the leading edge of an air intake... to reveal a crack in the metal, identical to the one in the grounded Vulcan. My disappointment was palpable. "Oh, not to worry," said the technician. "I think they all come cracked from the manufacturer. We mended the original with Araldite and it's flying now. I only ordered another to see if it was any better than the one we already have."

ANDREW HUMPHRIES

Lightening the load

Congratulations to Sergeant Jamie Baxendale on his innovative weight and balance program for the C-17 Globemaster [see last issue]. During my 16 years as an Air Loadmaster – on helicopters from 1973-1989 – manual calculations were required for the three underslung load hook positions as well as the two vehicles, or freight, carried

internally. Back in 1983, I too coded a weight and balance program in Basic – on a CASIO handheld computer that I purchased myself. It saved me many minutes of work. I showed the powers that be at the time, but no one showed sufficient interest to promote my idea. Let's hope the 'new look' Royal Air Force backs Air Loadmaster Jamie and includes such software across all logistics platforms in the future. I still have my CASIO.

KEITH FAULKNER

Bowling for boffins

During WWII, I was once sent to Combined Operations Establishment at Westward Ho! to steer a broken lorry back to the garage at Barnstaple. While waiting for the paperwork to be completed I strolled to nearby Pebble Ridge. Looking out over the scene I saw something that looked like a huge Ferris wheel careering up the beach, but with flames coming from only one side. Consequently, 'the wheel' was veering sideways – scattering the assembled boffins, who ran each way and everywhere. I and a number of other soldiers present couldn't help but laugh at the spectacle. The rocket – apparently an experiment in destroying Nazi beach mines – soon extinguished, and no boffins were harmed.

RAY PARSLEY



To train and educate



I enjoyed reading The International Intellectual article [*Air Mail*, Autumn 2023] and, as a former member of what used to be named the Education and Training specialisation, I found the content particularly interesting. It was heartening to read about the RAF's acknowledgement of the

importance of education alongside training. While the two are closely related, they are different, and I was interested to read that the Review of Officer and Airmen Development had concluded that in the past: "There had been too much training and not enough education". It is so refreshing to read that both are once again being recognised as the foundation of an effective air force. It is also encouraging to see that the Defence Academy embraces some of the latest practices that deliver effective personal development, such as experiential learning.

CHRIS CORDERY

Second to none

After reading the last issue on RAF engineering, I was reminded of my own training as an Aircraft Apprentice at RAF Halton, 61st Entry, Electrical. Although classed as an Electrician Air, I learned about airfield lighting, battery rooms, motor transport and marine craft. Upon leaving the RAF I went into industry, where I discovered just how good this training had been. As a design draughtsman at an aircraft manufacturer, I devised a new system which was adopted by the registration authority and 'suggested' to other manufacturers.

Later I joined the Admiralty Ferry Crews, and after a fire in a 200kW generator I was able to strip, clean and reassemble it – to the Chief Engineer Artificer's delight. All in all, being an engineer trained in the RAF gave me quite an advantage over my civilian-trained counterparts. **ALAN GORDON**

Meet the newest centenarian members

Queenie 'Robbie' Hall



ROBBIE HALL (nee Robinson) managed to join the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in 1940 at the age of just 17, after the recruiting officer was unable to verify her age due to Robbie 'accidentally' leaving her birth certificate

at home. After training, Robbie worked as a clerk in Bomber Command HQ at High Wycombe. She was then promoted to work under Group Captain Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, who she remembers as being a kind and approachable officer.

Various moves around the country followed, including a posting to Fighter Command, until demob in November 1945. Although Robbie loved her time in the WAAF, the experience was bittersweet. In 1944 her fiancée Frank Vincent was killed when his Lancaster was shot down over Germany. Maintaining her RAF connection, Robbie was involved in setting up the Association's Stowmarket Branch in 1949, becoming a committee member and secretary. Despite recently celebrating her 100th birthday, Robbie shows no signs of slowing down.

Edward 'Ed' Kelly



ED KELLY joined the RAF in 1942, before being sent to Canada for training to become a navigator. On his return Ed joined 534 Squadron, flying Wellington bombers on anti-shipping operations. Postings to 44 Squadron on Lancasters, then 86 Squadron on Liberators followed. By the end of the war Ed had reached the rank of Warrant Officer, and stayed in service to help with the

repatriation of prisoners of war from Germany.

In 1946 he was classed as a Master Navigator, a rank he held for the next 36 years. During his post-war service Ed took part in the Berlin Airlift, and was in the lead crew for the raid on Radio Cairo during the Suez Crisis. He retired from the RAF in March 1982 after more than 40 years in service. A keen member of the Association's Huntingdon and District Branch, Ed celebrated his 100th birthday with numerous visitors calling throughout the day. This was followed by a family dinner the following weekend.



To comment in or contribute to Air Mail please email airmail@rafa.org.uk

Alternatively, write to Annie O'Brian, Editor, Air Mail, RAF Association, Atlas House, Wembley Road, Leicester, LE1 3UT. Your correspondence should be clearly marked FOR PUBLICATION. The editor's decision on inclusion is final, and longer letters may be abridged due to limited space. Only submissions made by email will be acknowledged before publication.

The deadline for inclusion in the next issue is 3 May.

COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES

Join us on May 17 at
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An Evening at Brookwood

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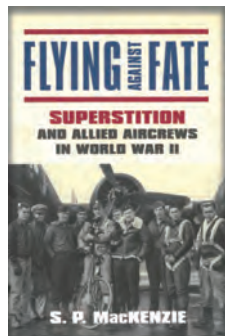


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FLYING AGAINST FATE



By: S P MacKenzie
Publisher: University Press of Kansas
Price: RRP £25

The many dangers of aerial combat during WWII saw

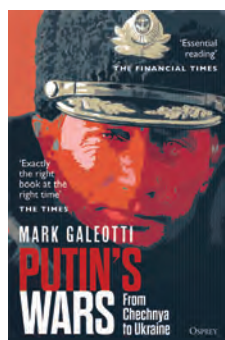
an upsurge in superstitious thought and behaviour among airmen. *Flying against Fate: Superstition and Allied Aircrews in World War II* offers an in-depth exploration of just how varied and deeply felt these superstitious beliefs were.

Mining a wealth of documents and a trove of memoirs and diaries, it examines how superstition manifested itself among Allied airmen. While some carried amulets or talismans, others performed rituals or avoided certain acts. Whatever seemed to work was worth sticking with and, with everything stacked against them, superstition helped airmen to believe they could even the odds.

The psychology behind much of this behaviour is also examined, as well as the ways in which it was tolerated and even encouraged by those in command, who often saw it as a way of buttressing morale.

Available from online retailers.

PUTIN'S WAR



By: Mark Galeotti
Publisher: Osprey Publishing
Price: RRP £10.99

Written by one of the world's leading experts on modern

Russia, *Putin's Wars* is a timely

overview of the conflicts into which Russia has plunged since Vladimir Putin became prime minister and then president.

From the First and Second Chechen Wars to the military incursion into Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the eventual full-scale invasion of Ukraine, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine* offers a vivid insight into the inner workings of the Kremlin.

Including both the aborted coup of June 2023 and a clear overview of how and why the Russian military has struggled in Ukraine, this is a thought-provoking history of how Putin and his wars have inexorably shaped Russia in the 21st century.

15% off for Association members at rafa.org.uk/galeotti or by calling 01256 302 692 (UK) or +44 1256 302 890 (non-UK) with discount code RAFA15. Valid until 30 June 2024.

STORIES FROM THE STALAGS



By: Martin W Bowman
Publisher: Pen & Sword
Price: RRP £25

From 1942 until the end of the war in Europe, the aircraft of the Royal Air

Force and United States Army Air Forces provided round-the-clock bombing of the Third Reich. Losses were heavy.

For those shot down, only baling out over enemy territory could offer any hope of survival. But this generally meant solitary confinement, interrogation and extreme hardship.

Martin Bowman's narrative describes the furious air battles that led to the predicament of many shot-down airmen, as well as the personal campaigns they fought to regain their freedom. Fascinating for its recreation

of the bombers' encounters with enemy fighters and flak, as well as the confrontations in captivity between prisoners of war and guards, *Stories from the Stalags* provides a real insight into the war as experienced by those who 'fell from formation'.

20% off for Association members at rafa.org.uk/bowman or by calling 01226 734 222 with discount code RAFA20. Valid until 30 June 2024.

SECOND WORLD WAR WEEK (INCLUDES D-DAY 80: FAMILY WEEKEND)



Location: RAF Museum London
Dates: 25 May to 2 June 2024
Tickets: £10 (D-Day

Family Weekend activities, free)

Join the museum's expert guides to explore the varied roles of the RAF during D-Day, from bombing to reconnaissance and logistics, all brought to life with the aircraft in Hangars 3, 4, 5. It will be running on selected dates, so please check with the museum.

Visitors can also discover more about D-Day through a range of fun family activities on the weekend of 1 and 2 June. Taking place from 10am to 5pm on 'the airfield' with 1940s-themed music, swing dance experts will teach visitors how to swing, twirl and groove to the music of the 1940s. Visitors can also make and drop their own parachute, build and test-fly their own paper glider and enjoy sketching and colouring activities.

To find out more visit: rafa.org.uk/ww2week or call 020 8205 2266.



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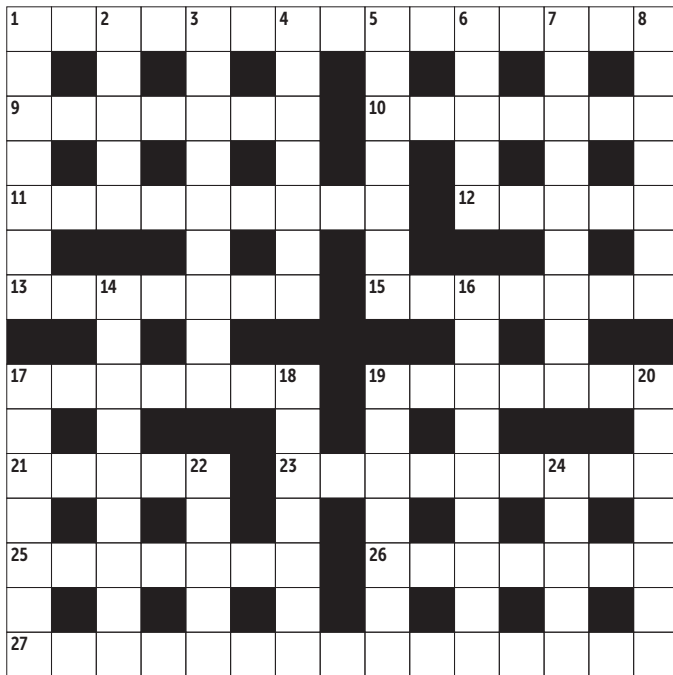


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or visit rafa.org.uk/rothbury**

Crossword

The Spring crossword
By Enigma



ACROSS

- 1 OIC (7-2-6)
- 9 Trade vehicles (7)
- 10 Bit gently (7)
- 11 Having shrewdness (9)
- 12 Future, for example (5)
- 13 Clothes not needing to be pressed after washing (3-4)
- 15 Talks at length about small mammals (7)
- 17 CHHHH (7)
- 19 This evening (7)
- 21 Monkey in 50:50 covering part of jacket collar (5)
- 23 Feverishly stir clean instruments (9)
- 25 To put back (7)
- 26 Person who de-fleeces sheep (7)
- 27 Rank one below MRAF (3,5,7)

DOWN

- 1 Reeling, can go to a many-sided figure (7)
- 2 In Scotland funnily I'm far from strange (5)

- 3 Place where visitors can often serve themselves (9)
- 4 Bear-like animal with black striped face and tail (7)
- 5 Person who does not take drugs (3-4)
- 6 Custom used by nun or monk (5)
- 7 Becoming less severe (9)
- 8 Eternal last point – not so much (7)
- 14 Be aware of writing material (9)
- 16 A jovial companion for '65' Romans in good French back street (9)
- 17 Fever caused by mosquitoes (7)
- 18 Discharge from former partner on Mediterranean island (7)
- 19 Lintel across old mirror initially (7)
- 20 A 'tanner' mentioned in the Fates trilogy (7)
- 22 Reluctant to be unwilling (5)
- 24 Some fear the 3rd planet from the sun (5)

ANSWERS
ON PAGE
66

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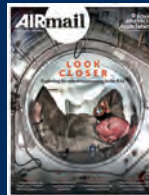
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Quiz

Ever wondered just how good your RAF-related knowledge was? Why not pit your wits against our quizmasters and find out?

1 Which twin-engined British WWII propeller fighter shares its name with a helicopter currently in RAF service?

2 When did the first woman chaplain serve in the RAF?
a) 1946-47, b) 1976-77,
c) 2006-7

3 Which service does not allow full hand tattoos?
a) Royal Navy, b) British Army, c) Royal Air Force,
d) all services allow full hand tattoos.

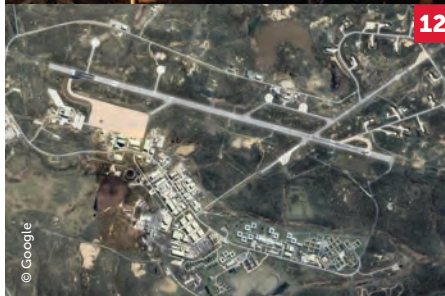
4 See picture: Which two aircraft are shown?

5 'Non ghostly cabin' is an anagram of which two current RAF stations?

6 See picture: The stripes on the wings are more commonly known as what?

7 Which country became the 32nd member of NATO when it joined in March 2024?

8 See picture: The interior of which aircraft is this?



9 2024 marks which anniversary for the RAF Red Arrows?

10 Which wartime RAF station in Cheshire was used as a training camp for National Servicemen after the war?

11 In January, the Defence Secretary reported that applications to join the RAF were up by what percentage? a) 10%, b) 21%, c) 42%

12 See picture: On which Atlantic island is this RAF airfield?

13 According to a long-standing superstition, prevalent among airmen during WWII, it was unlucky to light how many cigarettes from one match?

14 Which current RAF station is 987 miles due south of RAF St Mawgan?

15 Which famous incident, involving numerous RAF personnel, took place 80 years ago this March?

16 See picture: Which aircraft is this?

We record with sadness the passing of the following members of the RAF Association



Mr S Abbott	Nottingham	Mr T Croton	Crawley RMG
Mr W Adams	Headquarters	Air Commodore W Croydon CBE	Faversham
Mrs K Addison	Ryedale	Mr I Cruickshank	Basingstoke
Mr B Alexander	Fareham	Mr J Curtis BEM	Itchen and Hamble
Mrs L Allen	Kenley and Caterham	Mr J G S Curtis	Christchurch
Mr J Allsop	Sud-Ouest	Mr B Disney	Melksham
Mr B Andrews	Grimsby, Cleethorpes and District	Group Captain T Dole	Faversham
Mr C Apps	Formby	Mr J Doolan	Oldham
Mr P Ashton	Dunstable	Mrs M Duff BEM	Swiss
Mr G Banks	Falmouth	Mr R Durand	Bognor Regis
Mr G Banks	North Walsham	Mr L Eaton	Worcester and District
Mr R Barber MBE	Bedford	Mr J Eaves	Headquarters
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Mr J Baxter	Northampton and District	Mr W Evans	Worthing
Mr D Bennet	Sheffield	Mr D Everitt	Erewash
Mr K Bennett	Fareham	Mr R Ferre	Headquarters
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Mrs B Bird	Hartlepool	Mr D Flory	Cambridge
Mr M Blackney	Norwich	Mr J Floyd	Norwich
Mr S Blumlein	Alton	Mr J Foley	Christchurch
Mr R Blyth	Gloucester	Mr J Ford	Braunstone
Mr M Bonnett	Chelmsford	Mr G Forster	Llangollen
Mr R Botten	Headquarters	Mr J Forster	Llangollen
Mr R G Bradley	Hull and East Riding of Yorkshire	Mr J Garlick	Leyland and District
Mr T Brain	Sturminster Newton and Gillingham	Mr E Gibson	Bristol
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Mr K Martin	Seahaven RMG	Mr D Siddle	TCW and 90SU
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Mr C D Morgan	Headquarters	Mr B Studd	Headquarters
Mr M Neri	Swiss	Mrs Y Sumner	York
Mr J Newton	Global	Mrs J Sutehall	Headquarters
Mr J O'Connell	Headquarters	Mr T Swansey	Hartlepool
Mr I Owens	North Cotswolds RMG	Mr J Taylor	Cheltenham
Mr J Parker	Sheffield	Mrs D Taylor	Headquarters
Mr T Parker	Worcester and District	Mr D Templeton	Romsey
Mr G Pearce	Wimborne	Mr J Tetlow	Manchester and District
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To notify the RAF Association of the death of an RAF Association member, please contact their branch, email membership@rafa.org.uk or telephone our contact team on **0800 018 2361**. The Air Mail office regrets that we cannot directly accept notifications of a member's passing.

We specially remember those who had reached or passed their 100th birthday

Mr R Dowd	Headquarters	Mrs I Kemp	North Costa Blanca
Squadron Leader A Garretts MBE	Wantage and Oxford	Mrs B Mead	Headquarters
Mr C Hastings-Winch	Headquarters	Mrs B Teague	Grantham
Mr W Hughes	Camborne, Redruth and Illogan RMG	Mr M Thomas	RAF St Mawgan

Notices

Stay connected with RAF and RAF Association friends:
Your members-only service for reunions, research and more

Old comrades

Pompey Vic Hallin would like to contact anyone from the 22nd Entry Boy Entrants who joined up on 9 June 1954 at RAF Cosford, to get together to celebrate 70 years since enlistment. Contact Vic at vic.fh@btinternet.com or on 01782 772 963.

Reunions

The **77th Entry of RAF Halton Aircraft Apprentices** is holding a reunion on the 70th anniversary of signing on in the RAF, at the National Memorial Arboretum on 11 May 2024, hopefully with a service and lunch. Contact Secretary Peter Brooks at r.p.brooks@btinternet.com or on 07770 581 969.

The annual reunion of **RAF Cosford Craft Apprentices Entry No. 305** will take place at the Union Jack Club, London, between 3 and 5 October 2024. For details contact Graham at gpatrick50@gmail.com or call 07946 648 039.

Other

Tony and Margaret Wiles celebrated their platinum (70th) wedding

anniversary in December, marking the occasion with a gathering of family and friends before lunching out.

Julia Cain is looking for information on her aunt's father, who served in the RAF during WWII and had the first name Clarence. He had a daughter, Patricia, born in Leeds in September 1943. Contact Julia at peterjuliadancain@gmail.com.

The Association of **RAF Women Officers** welcomes all WAAF, WRAF and RAF women officers (serving or retired) wishing to join. With branches all over the country, we hold events to meet up, share memories and relax with kindred spirits. An annual reunion weekend is held in London in October. Contact Jane Chappell at janetwojane@gmail.com or visit arafwo.co.uk

All serving or retired **TG19 Warrant Officers or Flight Sergeants** and all former Catering Branch officers are invited to join the **RAF Catering Warrant Officers' and Seniors' Association (RAF CWO&SA)**. We meet twice yearly with a vibrant gathering of retired and serving members. For a membership application form email janedjones6@btinternet.com or call 01487 823 480. The first year of membership is free.

Shaun Carter would like to offer his **services as videographer**, free of charge, to anyone within the RAF family wishing to have a recording of a National Memorial Arboretum service. Shaun records numerous NMA services for those unable to attend, or who wish to have a permanent reminder of the event. For details visit www.ardua.me

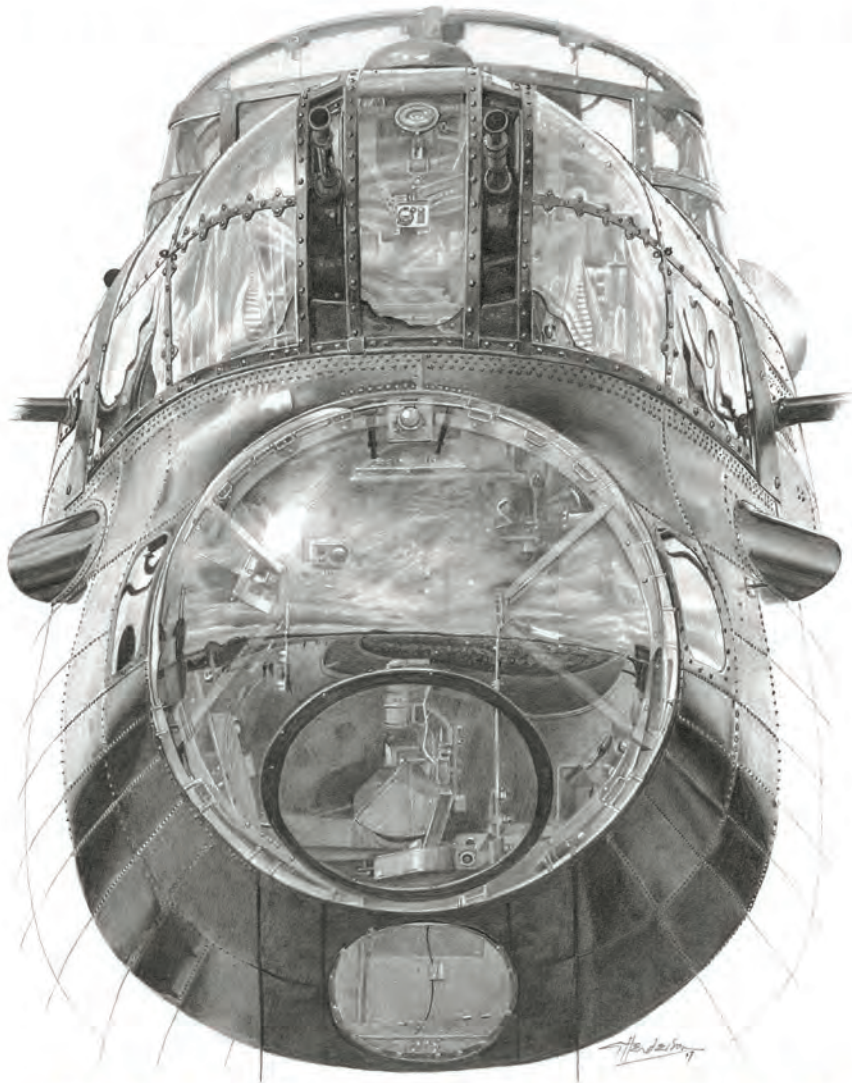
A Submit your notices – free for all members

Notices is a free member benefit to help you keep connected with people and places from your time in the RAF or the RAF Association, or to announce news of births, marriages, christenings, engagements, and more. For inclusion in the next issue, email your text to airmail@rafa.org.uk, post it to the address on the inside front cover or call 0800 018 2361 by **3 May**. Make sure to include an email address and/or telephone number in your message so readers can contact you, and please clearly state that your notice is 'for publication'. This is a service for members only.

3	Cafeteria	12	Tense	10	RAF Padgate	1	Westland Whirlwind	
4	Raccoon	13	Non-iron	11	(c) 42%	2	a) 1946-47	
5	Non-user	15	Rabbits	12	Falkland	3	(d) The RAF	
6	Habit	17	Methane	13	Three	4	overturned its ban in	
7	Relenting	19	Tonight	14	RAF Gibraltar	5	Feb. 2024	
8	Endless	21	Lapel	15	The Great Escape	6	Griffin and Puma	
14	Notepaper	23	Clarinets	16	Hawk T2	7	Coningsby and	
16	Bonvivier	25	Replace	Solution: Crossword		8	Halton	
17	Malaria	26	Shearer	Across:		9	D-Day invasion	
18	Excrete	27	Air Chief Marshal	1	Officer-In-Charge	10	stripes	
19	Transom	Down:		9	Traffic	11	Sweden	
20	Testril	1	Octagon	10	Nibbled	8	Chinook	
22	Loath	2	Fraim	11	Gumptions	9	60th	
24	Earth							

UNIQUE AVIATION GIFTS

from Aviation Artist **GRAHAM HENDERSON**, GAvA*



5 'Reflective Perspective' PA474 & VeRA at RAF Waddington



1 'Spitfire Sunset'



2 'Days of Thunder'



3 'Almost Home'



4 'Cleared Supersonic'

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1944
DAY 80
2024

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Eighty years ago, just after midnight on June 6, 1944, one of the most pivotal military operations of the 20th century commenced. Those first few hours were the beginning of the 'longest day', a day that will forever be known as D-Day.

As dawn broke, the largest seaborne invasion in history began. Allied forces spearheaded by British, Canadian and American troops stormed the beaches code-named Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha and Utah. Naval vessels bombarded the heavily fortified German defences along the coast, and Allied aircraft flew more than 14,500 sorties. Each helped to secure victory by land, sea and air in a campaign that would change the course of history, turning the tide of World War II and launching the liberation of Europe from the Nazis.

Eighty years later, the courage and commitment shown by the Allied troops who fought for our freedom on D-Day is commemorated on the brand-new D-Day 80th Anniversary Proof Fifty Pence Coin.

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A striking tribute to the heroism of those who landed along the shorelines of Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha and Utah beaches, the coin's design shows a stylised invasion map of the Normandy coastline and the emblems of the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force. Approved by Buckingham Palace, the obverse features the effigy of King Charles III.

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