



The charity that supports the RAF family
BELGIAN BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Editor responsible
Sgt R M Jacobs

RAFA Belgian Branch
Siege Social
Maison de Ailes
Rue Montoyer 1 – bte 33
1000 Brussels

RAFA Belgian Branch Account
BE 58-0014-2061-1779

Belgique-Belgie
PP/PB
1150 Woluwe Thielemans
2/3498
No Agregation P405263

Périodique trimestriel
Déposé-au bureau de poste c/e
1150 Woluwe Thielemans

NEWSLETTER NO 120

Nov 2018 – Jan 2019

Page 1	Index
Pages 2 - 3	Committee Contacts
Pages 4 - 8	Honorary President's Introduction
Page 9	Treasurer's Report
Pages 10 – 17	Reports on Past Events
Page 18	Welfare / In Memoriam
Page 19 - 20	Branch Administration
Page 21	Member's News
Pages 22 - 25	Chairman's Report on Area and National Conferences
Pages 26	Future Events Calendar

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



THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION
Maison des Ailes – Rue Montoyer 1-B 33-1040 Brussels
 Branch No: 0645
Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
Hon Patron: H.E. Alison Rose, British Ambassador
Branch Honorary President:
 Air Commodore J Maas CBE RAF
Vice-President
 Gp Capt R Whittingham RAF (Retd)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS – Nov 2018 – Jan 2019

CHAIRMAN	Vacant
VICE-CHAIR	Vacant
HONORARY CHAPLAIN	TBC
SECRETARY (designate)	Sqn Ldr Ben Goodwin
TREASURER	Wg Cdr David Trembazowki-Ryder (Retd)
HONORARY WELFARE OFFICER (HWO)	Mrs Ghislaine Walkden
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Mrs Brigitte Horton
LIAISON OFFICER	Gp Capt Neal Dewar
SHAPE RAFA LIAISON OFFICER (RAFALO)	FS Kim Jarvis
BRANCH WEBMASTER	Sgt Richard Jacobs
COMMITTEE MEMBER	Wg Cdr Ross McKenzie

COMMITTEE MEMBER	Mr Michel de Norman et d'Audenhove
COMMITTEE MEMBER	Wg Cdr Emma Thompson
COMMITTEE MEMBER	Wg Cdr Charles Howard-Vyse

For a quick answer to any query, please contact via email rafa.beligianbranch@gmail.com or to the Secretary on 0032 (0) 707 5470, NOT via the Post Box at Rue Montoyer.

From: *Air Commodore JD Maas CBE RAF*

Brussels, 04 January 2019

RAFA BELGIAN BRANCH – Honorary President's New Year Message

Dear Royal Air Forces Association Belgian Branch Members



As we look back on 2018 – the centenary year of the founding of the Royal Air Force - I think we as the Belgian Branch can safely say we have marked the year in some style with our four major events – the Birthday Reception, Comete Line Cycle to St Omer, the RAF 100 dinner night and most recently as hosts to the RAFA European Conference.

Starting in April, with the kind hospitality offered by our Honorary Patron Ambassador Alison Rose, we brought together over 120 from across our Network to mark the Birthday of the Royal Air Force. To have Leon and Jeff cutting the cake was a memory not to forget.



For the RAF community, putting on some *lycra* and heading to St Omer in early May felt as much a “pèlerinage” as a “pelaton” given that so many of our Royal Flying Corps squadrons were based in France at the point of transfer to the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918. With our co-opted Committee members Wing Commander Charles Howard-Vyse navigating and Wing Commander Emma Thompson in charge of the logistic train we succeeded in reaching the *Ad Astra* stone.



Along the way, we hooked up with *Monique* from the *Comete Line* who escorted us across the border into France ...just like the old days.

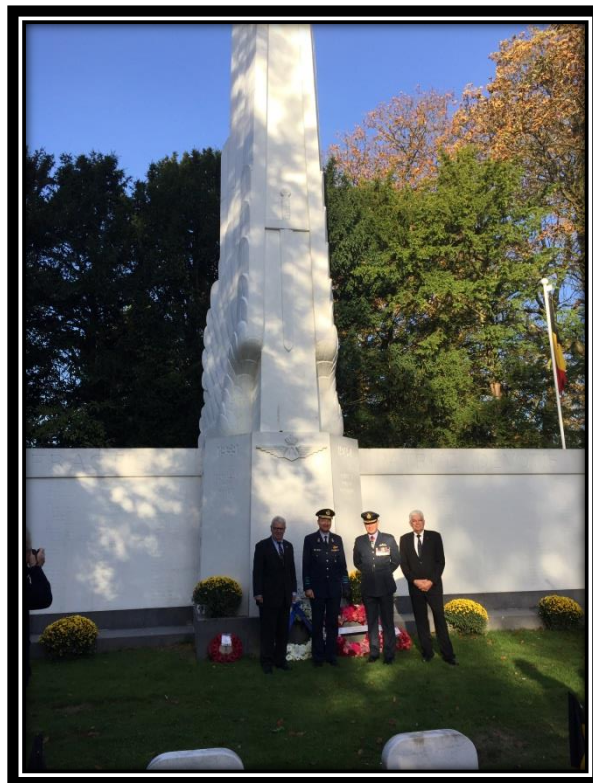
During the ride we noticed that *Monique* was not wearing her British parachute badge ... apparently it had never been awarded! This was remedied in the Club Prins Albert during our RAF 100 Dinner...



NB I really recommend the website recently updated by Sergeant Richie Jacobs...it has all the photos from the year.

In September we moved to the more formal commemorations linked not only to the anniversary of the Battle of Britain but of course remembering the close ties with our Belgian Comrades: The impressive Stele in Evere is perhaps the most evocative monument linked the BAF and RAF in memoriam. Below, in the presence of the Belgian Air Component Commander, Major General

Frederik Vansina, our Chairman Michel and honorary vice-President General Gerard Van Caelenberge, we ensured that the close bond between our two Air Forces is not forgotten.



Moving on to the Commonwealth War Graves plot, the graves of the fallen created a poignant reminder of the enormous sacrifices made by many to ensure freedom in Europe. Enormous thanks go to JeePee our ever willing and highly professional standard bearer who turns out come rain or shine along with Michel our Chairman.



The tribute and adding of another 30 or so plaques to mark the Squadrons on which Belgian pilots served during the Second World War to the wall of the RAF Chapel brought the tears to the eyes of

many in a most moving ceremony that closed the RAFA European Conference. – with a never to forget moment. With Leon Rubin leading the tribute organised so expertly by Wing Commander Ross Mackenzie, with Ghislaine de Coninck and Dick Whittingham present; it very much linked the heyday of the Branch to present times. The thanks received from the Delegates of the European Conference all noted their appreciation for having been included in this very Belgo-British Event.



In this very rapid flash through the year, I think some of the photographs capture the essence of what it means to be in RAFA – and it is most important that I take this very public opportunity to thank your committee who are the glue to RAFA in Belgium. To Michel, Brigitte, Danny, Ross, Ghislaine, David, Ben, Emma, Charles, Richie, Neale, Gerard and Kim (not forgetting JeePee) my sincere thanks for all your hard work.

2019 will of course bring its challenges. Many of you will know Danny our stalwart secretary has returned to the UK and Ben will take up this baton, and Michel our Chairman himself will retire at the end of the year after a very productive spell in charge. We have some new blood joining – notably Neale Dewar from SHAPE so as we move forward we will have to reconstitute our Committee at the AGM in March/April 2019. Here I would like to reach out to you all to seek your help in bringing in some new members to support our Association and keep the bond of Airman alive through Comradeship.

I wish you all a very happy new year - here is to 2019 ... and in so doing offer one last photo of our longest serving member to sum up the spirit of aviation. I bet if the keys to the Museum were left unattended Leon would be airborne in a flash!!!



Chocks away 2018...

Best wishes

John Maas,

Air Commodore

Honorary President RAFA Belgian Branch

PRE AGM 2019 ACCOUNTS

The final bill from the Bedford Hotel for the RAFA European Area Conference has not been received at the time of going to press (11 December), but the expected outcome will be neutral for the Branch (no loss). However, money (over 700 euros) collected from the raffle has been transferred to the Welfare Fund and will be used towards the cost of welfare gifts for Christmas. On 11 December 2018 the Current Account stood at 15.607,39 euros, the Welfare Account stood at 2.095.09 euros and the Deposit Account stood at 10.533.09 euros.

A full statement of accounts for 2018 – 2019 will be published as an addendum to edition 120 of the Belgian Branch Newsletter.

REPORTS ON PAST EVENTS

THE BELGIAN BRANCH OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION – POTTED HISTORY

2018 has been a significant year for our members, we have not only celebrated the centenary of the service, but we have also observed a centenary pass since the end of the First World War. Whilst we are in a reflective mood it is worth looking back at the origins of our Branch and contemplate upon how we can continue to support our members.

In the early 1940s following the invasion of Belgium, some 750 Belgians escaped to England and joined the RAF as aircrew, serving on 141 different squadrons: 187 Belgian aircrew were killed during the war. Many hundreds of RAF aircraft were shot down over Belgium, but 800 or so airmen were hidden from the enemy by the Belgian escape lines (principally the Comet Line) and returned to UK: this activity cost the lives of 156 Belgian civilians.



Against this background it is no surprise that when the opportunity arose to form overseas Royal Air Forces Association Branches, the Belgian Branch was one of the very first to do so on 12 November 1946 under the Chairmanship of Wg Cdr Le Roy de Vivier DFC. Léon Rubin joined the Branch in 1947 and although it saw some peaks and troughs, the Branch grew steadily under the Chairmanship of Belgian Air Force Lt Gen Baron Mike Donnet, reaching nearly 500 by the early 1980s. During the Chairmanship of Bob Walkden (husband of Ghislaine our current Branch Honorary Welfare Officer) from 1984 to 1992, the Branch went through a very successful period raising over 1.5 Million Belgian Francs (circa £30,000) by public subscription to create the Air Force Chapel in the National Basilica at Koekelberg, Brussels. The Chapel with its magnificent stained glass memorial windows commemorating the Belgians who served in the RAF in the Second World War and those who assisted the escape of shot down airmen, was dedicated in September 1988 at

a grand ceremony led by King Baudouin personally, plus the UK Ambassador and the Chief of the Air Staff as well as the Belgian Air Force Chief of Staff.

The close links with the Air Force Chapel and with the Comet Line have been maintained in recent years ensuring that the Chapel provides a central focus for Air Force Remembrance in Belgium. Joint Belgian Air Component/RAFA/Comet Line ceremonies were held in September 2013 to mark the 25th Anniversary of the dedication of the Chapel and in April 2014 to dedicate additional squadron shields: we will add to that number in our ceremony on Sunday.



Given the large number of aircraft that were lost over Belgium in the Second World War it is not surprising that throughout the last 71 years, the Branch has supported many dozens of memorial events across the country, sometimes to commemorate the loss of an aircraft or aircrew, sometimes to mark the bravery of pilots who managed to avoid civilian casualties, sometimes to commemorate the loss of civilian lives either as a result of accident or in support of escape or evasion. The really heart-warming fact is that these commemorations continue to this day and serve to remind us all, of the close bond between the RAF and the Belgian people.

HISTORICAL SNIPPETS

The above potted history gives an overview of the Belgian Branch during the last 71 years. During that period, the Branch and its members have participated in some truly historic events and there is a wonderful story to be told of the Branch and its members. Sadly, little written or photographic evidence of Branch activities exists prior to the introduction of a formal Branch Newsletter in July 1983. The Branch holds nearly all of the back numbers from then on (missing only editions 1, 25, 27 and 31), and these provide a fascinating glimpse into Association activities and people across the years. Future Branch Newsletters will feature snippets from this archive. If you have any special remembrances, or have copies of the missing Newsletters, please contact the Editor.

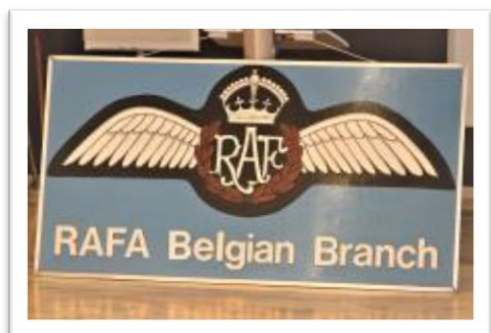
Written by Mr Dick Whittingham

European Autumn Conference Brussels 2-4 November 2018

(Conference & Gala Dinner)

Between September and November 2018 the committee busied itself by making preparations for one of the association's major annual events. The Belgian Branch was to host the European Autumn Conference; under the stewardship of the Branch Honorary President, Air Commodore John Mass CBE RAF and the Branch Chairman Michel de Norman et d'Audenhove, Committee members coordinated the various work stands that would ensure all our guests would receive a warm welcome.

The Bedford Hotel & Conference Centre was selected as the venue for the event; boasting numerous conference rooms and being ideally situated to local tourist hot spots like the Grand-Place, the Bedford Hotel offered all of the amenities necessary to make our guests feel comfortable.



Delegates that attended the conference were informed of key policy changes and the aspirations of the association for the future. Newly appointed Welfare Officers and Treasures were provided training on topics like governance, data protection and financial training in a development workshop.



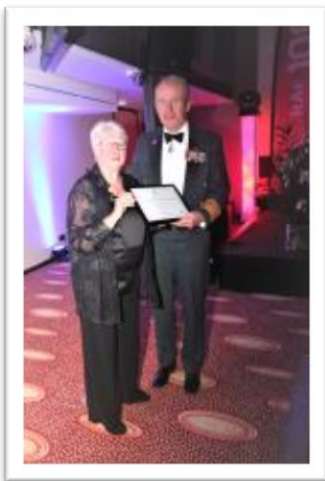
With the serious business out of the way, the festivities could begin in the wonderfully decorated ballroom (floral arrangements courtesy of Mrs Penny Maas, Mme Brigitte Horton and Mme Ghislaine Walkden). Guests met for some champagne and canapés before being called through to the ballroom. Led smartly by cadets from 350 Sqn ATC, the association standards were marched into the ballroom and hung above the diners, once settled the Branch Honorary President extended a warm welcome to all of the guests before inviting Wg Cdr Howard-Vyse to deliver grace.

During the meal, Lt Cdr Foreman (RN) entertained guests with a historical review of flight and the accomplishments of the RAF. With hunger quelled, the VIPs delivered their speeches, touching briefly upon the significance of the Royal Air Forces centenary year and the cessation of hostilities at

the end of the First World War. During his speech, the European Area President AM Phillip Sturley CB MBE FRAeS informed guests that he would be stepping down as the Area President and would be replaced by AM Sir Graham Stacey KBE CB.



European Area Presidential Certificates were issued to delegates that had shown exemplary service and had gone above and beyond to raise funds for the Wings Appeal. Mrs Beryl Dennent-Stannard (Sud-Ouest France), Mrs Sue McNae (North Costa Blanca) and Mr Regis Pizot (Swiss branch) were amongst the deserving recipients. Additional funds were raised for the charity towards the end of the evening, when the cadets of 350 Sqn ATC distributed raffle tickets ahead of the tombola; prizes were generously donated by association members attending the gala event.



From my personal perspective, the gala dinner was a huge success, the culmination of months of hard work and preparation. It was immensely satisfying to see everybody enjoy the evening, it was also an opportunity to solidify ties with the other branches and establish new and lasting friendships with our colleagues from across Europe.

Written by Sgt Richard Jacobs

Editor

Mons Liberation Parade 11 November 2018 & Lieut. Cecil Whyte, Royal Flying Corp

On the morning of 11 November 1918 official word was passed to the Canadians in Mons, Belgium, to hold their place and cease hostilities. Later that morning, the Pipes and Drums of the Royal Highlanders of Canada would lead Canadian troops in an impromptu celebratory parade through the streets of Mons, a city they had just liberated, to celebrate the end of The Great War.

100 years later on 11 November 2018, the Royal Highlanders of Canada – now known as the Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment of Canada once again led a parade through the streets of Mons to mark and commemorate that historic moment. Many relatives of the men that fought there in WW1 travelled from Canada to remember and honour their family members, of whom many didn't return and are buried on Belgian soil.

One such family on their personal pilgrimage of Remembrance was Scott Whyte and family. When war broke out his grandfather's cousin, Cecil Whyte joined the Canadian Engineers. He travelled from Canada to the UK in April 1915 and went through various training camps at Shornecliffe, Dibgate and Sandling. By September 1915 he was in the trenches.

He was badly wounded on 13 November 1916 with shrapnel in both legs during the battle of Ancre in France, the final large British attack of the Battle of the Somme. He was hospitalized in England and then returned home to Canada in 1917. Five months later he was declared fit and returned back to England to fight again. Cecil Whyte applied for a commission and was then sent to the Cadet School for an officer's course. He was attached to the Artists Rifles Officer Training Corp at St Omer, France.

Much of what is known about Cecil comes from his war diaries which he kept throughout his service. There were three diaries but only two have survived. The first diary covers April 1915 when he left Canada until 20 November 1915. The diary covering the period from the end of November 1915 until October 1917 when he was detached to the Artists Rifles in June 1916 for his training, has sadly been lost but photographs of his Artists Rifles Cadet group survive. After his training Cecil was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Scots Regiment and then finally joined No 98 Squadron, Royal Flying Corp (RFC). The third diary begins in October 1917 as Cecil is leaving for RFC training and ends a few days before his death.

RFC 98 Squadron's time in combat in France starts on 21 March 1918. An extract from the [98 Sqn History](#) for this period is "The following message of congratulation was issued on 18th April: The General Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force in the Field, wishes me to express his thanks and good wishes to the Officers, NCOs and men of No 98 Squadron for their fine work at the start of the present battle. He hopes that the same spirit of doggedness, determination and sacrifice will still be maintained by the Squadron as a whole in the battles that are to come, and looks to No 98 Squadron to keep up the reputation it has already gained never failing".

In the photographs below the soldiers are wearing armbands with the words 'Cadet School' embroidered on them. Some of the cadets are wearing Artists Rifles cap badges. But there are many other cap badges on display and Cecil Whyte is still wearing his Royal Engineers cap badge.



Cecil Whyte – second row seated, second on the left

Cecil Whyte's Canadian Army records show him attached to the 28th Bn, London Regiment. The records stated that he was “struck of strength”, a term which signifies that an individual has become the responsibility of another unit.

According to the official record Cecil's aircraft, a DH9 was shot down near Geluwe, Belgium on 3 May 1918. The aircraft broke up at 4000 feet and one of the two occupants was seen to fall from the aircraft. Cecil was the Observer in the aircraft. The pilot Richard Holiday, like Cecil Whyte, has no known grave.

Also marching with the Canadians at the Liberation Parade in Mons on 11 November 2018, was the Artists Rifles Association. The Artists Rifles Regiment in WW1 started at Mons in 1914 and ended in Mons in November 1918. The last three Artists Rifles soldiers were killed in action on the 9 November and are buried in Harveng Cemetery Belgium. In total nearly 1500 men went through the Officer Training programme of the Artists Rifles. A Memorial will be unveiled at the site of Artists Rifles Hare Hall camp in Gidea Park, Essex in 2019 to remember them.

Almost 1000 of the Artists Rifles recruits were commissioned to the RFC/RAF. A third of these men were killed in action and many have no known graves but are mentioned on the Arras Flying Services Memorial. The Arras Flying Services Memorial commemorates 990 British casualties who died on active service on the Western Front in France and in Belgium and who also have no known grave. This Memorial commemorates those who served with the Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force and can be found in the Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery, Boulevard du General de Gaulle, Arras.

Scott Whyte, a relative of Cecil's was pleased to meet members of Artists Rifles Association by chance, on 11 November 2018; and so another connection in history is made and perhaps one day, 2nd Lieutenant's Cecil Whyte's grave may be found.



Cecil Whyte – back row, first on the left

Written by Greg Ruthven

ARMISTICE DAY WREATH LAYING CEREMONY 11 November 2018

In commemoration of the fallen of both World Wars, the honorary President Air Commodore JD Maas, the Chairman Michel de Norman and the Membership Secretary Madame Brigitte Horton laid a wreath on behalf of the Royal Air Forces Association Belgian Branch at the eleventh hour one hundred years to the day of the signature of the Armistice.



Article written by Air Cdre J D Maas CBE RAF

Honorary Belgian Branch President

WELFARE / IN MEMORIUM

Throughout 2018 welfare activities have been diligently carried out by our committee members and welfare team. As in previous years, support has been delivered in the form of welfare visits, telephone calls and letter writing to our members. Through the persistence of the welfare team financial aid was secured for one of our deserving members.

However, from year to year the number of requests for assistance has begun to diminish, due in part to the unfortunate passing of several of our elderly members. Should members be in need of any assistance, please let us know; we are here to help!

It is with great sadness that I inform our members of the passing of the following friends and comrades.

Paule HEARN widow of our former Vice President Édouard Hearn (Ted)

Helene VANWERSH former Committee Member

Report submitted by Mrs Ghislaine Walkden

Belgian Branch Welfare Officer

ADMINISTRATION

MEMBERSHIP

Unless you are a Life Member, RAFA Membership fees for 2019 are due in January 2019. We have recently been informed by RAFA Headquarters that membership fees have been increased for all categories of membership (except Life Members). In line with the RAFA Belgian Branch terms agreed at the Annual General Meeting in 2011 only 2 rates are applicable for members paying membership fees in Belgium.

*****With effect from 1 January 2019 the fees for Ordinary and Associate Members are €30 for 1 year subscription and €80 for a 4 year subscription.*****

Please transfer funds to RAFA Belgian Branch Account BE58 0014 2061 1779 (FOR MEMBERSHIP FEES).

A moins d'être "Membre à Vie", toutes les cotisations pour 2019 doivent être payées en 2019.

Récemment, le siège de la Rafa nous a informés d'une augmentation des cotisations pour toutes les catégories de membres (à l'exception des membres à vie).

Conformément au Règlement de la branche belge de la RAFA une décision a été prise lors de l'Assemblée Générale de 2011 d'appliquer seulement deux prix aux membres qui paient leur cotisation en Belgique.

... A partir du 1er janvier 2019 , pour un an d'abonnement le prix est de 30 Eur pour les membres ordinaires et associés, et de 80 Eur pour 4 ans...

mention "Cotisation Veuillez transférer ce montant au compte en banque de la branche belge : BE58 0014 2061 1779, avec la

MEMBER'S NEWS

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

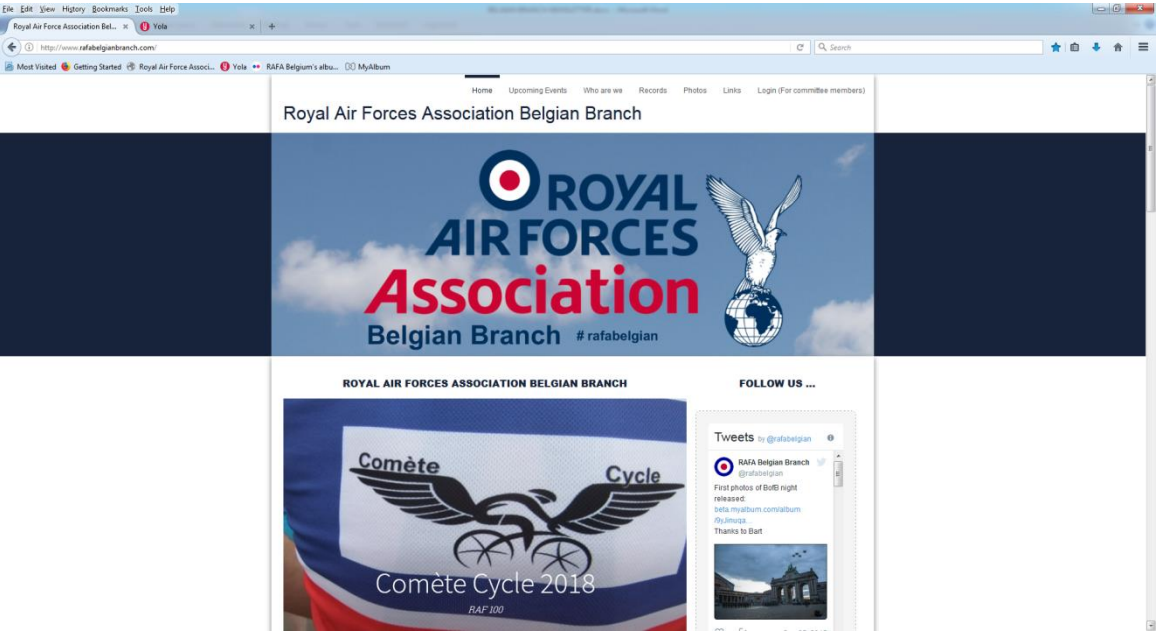
BRANCH WEBSITE

The branch website is in the process of redevelopment at the moment, those of you that use the site will start to notice new content being added more frequently. Sgt Jacobs has recently joined the committee, assuming the role of the Branch webmaster. He will endeavour to keep you informed of the Branches activities and include the content that you request.

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

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

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





The charity that supports the RAF family

MEMBER'S NEWS

This page is your opportunity to contact former colleagues or inform the RAFA community of events occurring in your area. Simply forward your story or request to the Secretary or the 'Contact Us' on the website and we will publish it.

CHAIRMANS'S REPORT ON AREA AND NATIONAL CONFERENCES

Introduction

Colleagues of the European Area, I hope that the circulation of the Area Chairman's report to the Autumn Area Conference in advance of conference does not take you too much by surprise. This is a change from previous procedures and the reason for this change is several-fold: to save time during conference; to reduce the number of (often lengthy) verbal presentations; and to give Branches and Delegates prior knowledge of what the Chairman has to report, giving time for Branches to consider questions for the Area Council. However, perhaps the most important reasons for this decision are an attempt to make our conference more user-friendly, to leave more time in the agenda to maximise the opportunities that our guest speakers provide and for us to focus on more important matters that need our attention as an Area of the RAF Association.

Additional to this report being forwarded prior to conference, you will also receive advance copies of reports from our RAFA Council Representative (C Rep) and the European Area RAFA Liaison Officer (EA RAFALO).

I ask that you ensure that your Branch Delegate receives copies of these reports and that, wherever possible, the reports are considered by you Branch committee and comments raised notified to your Delegate, so your views can be aired during conference.

Certificate Presentations and Awards

A further change to our conference procedures in Brussels will be the manner by which our certificates and awards are presented. In another attempt to provide more time during our conferences, as explained above, it has been agreed by the Area Council that the presentation of awards be made during the Saturday evening Gala Dinner. All too often in the past, because of extended discussion on other conference business, the time available at the end of our conference for awards has been limited and the presentations have been hurried – which should not happen. The recognition of the outstanding achievement of our members should be accorded the correct level of appreciation and not be seen as a rushed addition at the end of conference. Additionally, moving the presentation of certificates and awards to the Gala Dinner would add significantly to the Area's acclaim to those in receipt of the awards. Your councillors hope that you will understand the rationale behind this decision.

Area Rules Variations

You will hear at our conference in Belgium, under Matters Arising from our conference in Yarnfield, the proposal for European variations to the Area Byelaws contained in the new Governance Handbook submitted to Council by our Area Working Group was not accepted and more work is required before resubmission.

Dispensation from Area Rules Byelaw 7(7)

Byelaw 7(7): *Branches must forward the full amount of any subscriptions received from members to the Headquarters. Part of each subscription for a member of a Branch will be returned to the home Branch, at the beginning of each subscription year, based on the membership of the Branch at the end of the previous subscription year."*

A recent email circulated by me (as Area Chairman) to all Branches in the European Area informed that our request to Council for a European Area dispensation from Byelaw 7(7) of the Governance Handbook (copied above) had not been successful and that a paper containing greater factual supporting evidence was required. The original case had received some support from the Branch and Membership Committee of Council. However, our request, which was expected to be considered from the common-sense point of view, was not agreed. It had been our opinion that the unnecessary and excessive monies in Euro being transferred to and from the UK in payment of annual subscriptions, including the Branch rebate, was a waste of charitable funds. Unfortunately, Council did not accept this argument and required detailed costs involved and an explanation of any hardship caused by the delayed return of Branch rebates until sometime during the year following that in which the subscriptions were paid – we remain unsure as to when the subscription rebate will be paid as this will be dependent upon the receipt at HQ of the completed Branch Form 1056.

Response to my email was poor and, as at the drafting of this report, few Branches had replied, and the majority of those had found their own solution to this situation. Consequently, at this time I can only assume that feeling across the majority of Branches in the Area regarding this issue is not sufficiently strong to justify taking our argument forward at this time. The Costa Blanca Branch is thanked for raising this matter as a Resolution at our conference in Yarnfield, but regrettably with only very limited support from elsewhere within the Area, it cannot be taken further by the Area Council. This has been notified to the Council, Branch and Membership Committee, with the caveat that should a stronger and unified voice be forthcoming from Branches in the Area then the question relating to a dispensation could be raised again in the future.

Area Council and Branch Officer Training

You will be aware from articles in recent editions of Air Mail and from an email sent by me on behalf of the Area Council that, following strong recommendations from Council and the Secretary General, the Area Council has arranged for training to be provided during our Area Conference weekend for members of the Area Council and Branch Delegates in the subject of GDPR, Governance, Finance and (time permitting) Health and Safety. As already advised, training will take place during the afternoon 3 Nov in the conference hotel. Del Rowlands (Director of Membership) and Vikki Hall (Director of Governance and Risk) from HQ will be attending the conference and will be conducting the training. This is very important training which is essential for the good governance of our Association and must be attended by all Branch representatives joining us for the conference in Brussels. Further training will be organised during our Area Annual Conference in Birmingham in May 2019 for those Branches that cannot be represented in Brussels.

Whilst it is appreciated that not all Delegates attending the conference in Brussels will necessarily benefit directly from the training, it is expected that attendees will return to their respective countries following training and ensure that the knowledge gained is passed to the appropriate officers in their Branch. Handouts will be made available in all subjects.

BREXIT

As it is anticipated that we could have a specialist BREXIT speaker at our conference in Brussels I will not comment further on this subject here. Furthermore, we have received confirmation that Vikki Hall, Director of Governance and Risk at HQ, will also be attending our conference and will be available to shed light on this subject. As the 'lead' within the Association on the subject of Risk (including those associated with BREXIT), Vikki may try to answer any questions you have.

Governance

You should already be aware that the Chairman of Council has, via the medium of email and Air Mail, commenced a survey into the resolution passed at the 2018 Annual Conference relating to One Member One Vote (OMOV). This means that each member would have the opportunity to vote directly on any raised issue, rather than being represented by their branch delegate. The resolution could, if approved, influence the manner in which we conduct elections and reach Association decisions in the future. It is important, therefore, that we all engage in this survey and let your thoughts be known. You still have time to participate as the survey does not close until midnight 4 November.

It will have become apparent over the past few months that Carol Titterington, from the RAFA Belfast Office, has become increasingly more involved with communications between our Area HQ and Branches. This is a result of our recent campaign to increase the administrative support for the European Area; you may recall that the Area Council submitted a case for the appointment of an Area Support Officer, along the line of the Branch Support Officers employed by the Association in the UK. Although our proposal was not approved by Council, a review of the distribution of resources in the Belfast Office (where our Area Director is located) identified workload (especially that involving Welfare) that could be re-appropriated allowing a redistribution of Northern Ireland and European Area responsibilities between Sarah and Carol to be achieved. The changes, which are intended to provide time for Sarah to concentrate more on providing direct support to Area Branches, are being kept under review by the Area Council.

Area Conference Frequency

As previously reported, the Area President asked that we review why we have 2 European Area conferences each year. The Area Council tasked a small working group, comprising Area Vice President Beryl Dennett-Stannard, Area Elected Member Pete McWilliams and Area Life Vice President Simon Martin (as a Co-opted member) to review our need for 2 conferences. The Review Team was given wide-sweeping TORs and asked to approach members of the Area Council and Branches for opinion. The Team was also tasked to draw comparisons with our colleagues in the UK. The response from our Branches was poor, with only 50% returning the questionnaire. The outcome of the Review will be discussed during the Area Council meeting to be held on 2nd November and conclusions reached will be advised to Branches following that meeting.

Wings

In 2017 our Area Branches raised over £53,485.12k for the Association Wings Appeal. A good result, but I hope that our Branches will have achieved a better result in 2018, the 100th Anniversary year of the RAF. It was pleasing to note that 6 of our 18 Branches each raised and donated over £5,000 in 2017 - Certificates acknowledging their achievements are to be presented in Brussels when our Area President can be with us. Please remember that your Wings Returns and

donations for 2018 must be sent to Pete Brocklehurst, Marketing, Fundraising and Trading at HQ by no later than Friday 9th November 2018 for your contribution to count against this year's collection. Monies paid-in after that date will not be included. As you are already aware, HQ now operates a Euro Bank Account that you can use if appropriate – account details can be obtained from the Area Director. Good luck!

Please remember that the crediting of rebate by HQ to Branches is dependent upon the receipt at HQ of a fully completed F1056 – don't delay, get it in the post (or email) as quickly as you can!

Membership

The Area Council is aware that within the Area there remain a number of our members whose membership renewal for 2018, continues to show that they changed to 'Anniversary' members rather than their previous status of 'Ordinary members. Considerable discussion took place between the Sec Gen and me, as Chairman of the Area Council, in an effort to rectify the situation. Whereas the intention was to have the record of all those affected amended to Annual membership, it had only limited success. However, one concession received from the Sec Gen was that Branches that could supply to HQ the names of all those members who had renewed their membership with their Branch prior to the end of January 2018 (irrespective of when the subscription was paid to the Branch and passed to HQ) would have their records amended. This advice was passed to Branches. However, I am not aware of the response as my access to such information was limited by the DPA. However, I am aware that some Branches were content with the revised membership renewal date (for most, in February 2018) as it provided 2 free months of membership. If problems still exist, then Branches are encouraged to inform me as soon as possible as the next round of membership renewals is about to commence.

I am aware that a number of Branches in the Area are experiencing difficulties in maintaining their membership numbers. These are difficult times within mainland Europe, particularly with the uncertainties caused by BREXIT. I hope that the reorganisation of manpower in the Area Office will provide some additional resources to encourage a growth in membership.

I must remind Branches that the grace period for the lapsing membership has reduced from 90 days to 30 days. This means that membership will cease if a renewal subscription is not paid within 30 days of the end of the current membership period. In the past, the Area has benefitted from some leeway given the time it takes for the post between overseas and the UK. However, such flexibility will not be shown in future.

A further reminder that subscription rebates will only be paid by HQ to Branches following receipt at HQ of a fully completed F1056. Don't let HQ hang onto our money for any longer than is absolutely necessary!

From figures provided by HQ the membership for the European Area currently stands at 1,937 although as at the last count, the Area had only 150 lapsed members. Consequently, we must all make every effort to recover as many of our lapsed members as is possible. There is still time before the end of the year to contact these missing members and encourage them back into the fold. Please do whatever you can.

Close

In closing this report, I would like to give my own appreciations to our Area Director for efficiently handling the ever-increasing workload that accompanies her duties in running the Area.



The charity that supports the RAF family

FUTURE CALENDAR EVENTS

Kicking off the events for 2019 will be the AGM which is scheduled for March 2019 (details will be posted on the Branch Website www.rafabelgianbranch.com).

A meet and greet will be organised at the Maison des Ailes in April, this will be an opportunity for branch members to catch up after an exhausting 2018.

Updates regarding future events will be publicised on the Branch Website.