

Meilleurs Voeux pour 2019

**Dear Royal Air Forces Association Belgian Branch Members**

**RAFA BELGIAN BRANCH – Honorary President’s New Year Message**



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



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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



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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.



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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 Whitingham present; it very much linked the hayday 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!!!



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Chocks away 2108...

Best wishes

John Maas,  
Air Commodore  
Honorary President RAFA Belgian Branch

