



The charity that supports the RAF family
Belgian Branch

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RAFA Belgian Branch Account
BE58-0014-2061-1779

NEWSLETTER February 2025

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Chair's Welcome

Dear members and friends of RAFA,

First, I apologise for the lack of Newsletter for some time. A combination of COVID and work pressures conspired against us. Hopefully, we can get back to reporting to you more regularly this year.

You will be pleased to hear that we have a strong and committed Committee looking forward to enhancing our support and activities throughout the year. The Annual General Meeting 2025 will take place on 6 March 2025 at 19.00 hrs CET by Zoom. We are holding the meeting virtually as our committee members are spread across Belgium and the Netherlands. The Zoom details are below.

Some of you will have seen that we cannot use our 'official' address at Le Maison des Ailes/Het Huis der Vleugels after April 2025. The building is being sold, and we will no longer have a post box there. One of our Committee members has kindly agreed that we can use her private address as the RAFA Belgian Branch post box. You will see the new address on the heading in the newsletter.

Even though we have not been able to produce a newsletter, the Committee has been busy throughout the last year at various commemorative events in Belgium. More of this is reported in the newsletter. Unfortunately, I have to report that several of our members have passed away since the last newsletter; some obituaries are given further in the newsletter.

We are planning a small commemoration at the Koekenberg Basilica on 1st April 2025; confirmation and more details will follow. We hope you can attend.

If you can, we find that using email as a means of communication is much easier and better for the environment. If you would like the Committee to communicate with you via email, please contact any of the Committee members (see the last page) at their listed email address.

In summary, I would like to thank the Committee for continuing their work and meeting the challenges and frustrations of the year by finding new ways of working and for their quiet but steely determination to carry on and get things done. You can read about that in this newsletter.

We look forward to meeting you at our virtual AGM on 6th March. Wishing you a healthy 2025.
Kind regards

Stephen Hanson,
Lt Col RCAF (Retd)
Chair, RAFA Belgian Branch

Subscriptions

All members are reminded that subscriptions are due in the month before their membership expires. Also, it is not possible to apply for a new 4-year membership. Only those with an existing 4-year membership may continue to subscribe to this option. Unless a Life Member, all other new subscriptions are for one year only. Many thanks to Brigitte for coordinating the renewals with RAFA HQ.

Some years ago, it was agreed in Committee that members who that paid their subscription to the Belgian Branch account would pay a simple set fee for 1-year and 4-year membership. These fees are the same for Ordinary and Associate membership, and everyone would receive Airmail unless you explicitly decline the magazine.

The fee structure is as follows:

- 1 year: 25 euros
- 4 years: 80 euros

When making payments to the Branch Bank Account, please ensure that the reason for the payment is mentioned in the “communication” section (for example, “annual Subscription/cotisation”).

Please make any payments to the following account:

RAFA Belgian Branch Account
BE58-0014-2061-1779

Many thanks to you all!

**2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BELGIUM BRANCH OF THE
ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION, TO BE HELD VIA ZOOM VIDEO
TELECONFERENCE AT 1900 CET ON 6 MARCH 2025**

AGENDA

Zoom contact details:

Meeting ID: 892 3785 0800

Passcode: 676753

<https://app.zoom.us/jc/89237850800>

ITEM 1:	Dedication	Chair
ITEM 2:	Chair's Opening Remarks	Chair
ITEM 3:	Apologies, if Any	Chair
ITEM 4:	Election/Re-election of Officers & Committee	Chair
ITEM 5:	Treasurer's Report 2024	Treasurer
ITEM 6:	Honorary Welfare Officer's Report 2024	Honorary Welfare Officer
ITEM 7:	Membership Officer's Report 2024	Membership Officer's
ITEM 8:	RAFALO's Report 2024	RAFALO
ITEM 9:	Branch Budget 2025	Treasurer
ITEM 10:	Maison des Ailes and New Address	Chair
ITEM 11:	Background Checks from RAFA England	Chair
ITEM 12:	Any Other Business	Chair
ITEM 13:	Closing Remarks	Chair

RAFA BELGIUM BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

ITEM 4 – ELECTIONS

1. The following will be re-appointed/appointed and not subject to ratification at the AGM:

- Flt Sgt Richie Atha SHAPE RAFALO

2. The following seek re-election/election as Officers of the Branch Committee at the AGM: *

- LCol (retd) Stephen Hanson Chair
- Sqn Ldr (retd) James Tenniswood Vice-Chair
- Wg Cdr (retd) David Trembaczowski-Ryder Treasurer
- Sgt Matt McCosh Secretary
- Flt Sgt Richie Atha Vice-Secretary

4. The following seek re-election/election as members of the Branch Committee at the AGM: *

- Mrs Ghislaine Walkden Honorary Welfare Officer (HWO)
- Mrs Brigitte Horton Membership Secretary
- Gary Cartwright Committee Member

5. If you have any other persons that you would like to nominate, please contact us.

* Proposers and Seconders will be sought at the meeting.

Dear Committee,

RAFA Belgian Branch – AGM Elections 2020

I (insert name), _____,

Membership number, _____

of (address):

I would like to nominate:

Surname, First Name: _____

Rank (if any): _____

For the position of: _____

**Royal Air Forces Association
Belgian Branch
Statement of Accounts – 2024**

Assets as at 01/01/24 **10,987.26**

Assets	Euros
BNP Paribas Fortis Bank (Current)	9,949.75
BNP Paribas Fortis Bank (Welfare)	404.42
HQ Account (UK)	582.02
Petty Cash	0.00

TOTAL ASSETS 10,936.19

Net Asset Surplus at 31/12/2024 **10,936.19**

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BNP Paribas Fortis (Welfare Account) **Euros**

Start Balance – 01/01/24 **356.22**

Income	
Transfer from Current Account	500.00

Expenditure	
Bank Charges	45.00
Xmas gifts – hampers (2024)	295.90
Welfare Expenses (2024)	110.90
Total Expenditure	451.80

Closing balance 31/12/24 **404.42**

BNP Paribas Fortis (Current Account)		Euros
Opening balance 01/01/24		10,461.66
Income	Euro	
Subscriptions	400.00	
Donations	865.00	
Total	1,265.00	
Total (Opening balance plus income 2024):		11,726.66
Expenditure:		
Bank Charges	45.00	
HQ Membership Subscriptions	500.00	
Transfer to Welfare Account	500.00	
Wings Appeal	93.00	
Moniteur Belge	157.91	
Wreaths	481.00	
Total Expenditure	1,776.91	
Closing Balance 31/12/24		9,949.75
HQ Account (UK)	GBP	Euros
Opening balance 01/01/24	145.50	169.38
Closing balance 31/12/24	483.19	582.02

RAFA BELGIAN BRANCH A.S.B.L

Draft BUDGET 2025

INCOME	Euro
Subscriptions	300
Donations	300
Wings Appeal	200
Total Income	<u>800.00</u>
EXPENDITURE	
Wings Appeal – transfer to UK	200
Welfare:	
Expenses	100
Christmas Gifts	300
Total	<u>600.00</u>
Administration:	
Bank Charges	90
Wreaths	250
Miscellaneous	100
Newsletter postage	120
BAFA Subscription	30
Maison des Ailes Postbox	60
Moniteur Belge	160
Total	<u>810.00</u>
Total Expenses	<u>1,410.00</u>
Excess Expenditure over Income	<u>610.00</u>

Obituaries

Leon Rubin

Léon Rubin, who passed away on the 16th of June 2023 aged 97, was one of our last branch veterans to have seen service in the Second World War.

He had an extraordinary wartime story. Not least because he was one of only a handful of Swiss nationals to have ever served in the Royal Air Force. I know some of our Belgian members might raise a few eyebrows on hearing that. But it's true. Although he spent most of his life living and working in Brussels, Léon was Swiss through his father.

When Belgium was occupied, Léon was 14 and still at school. He read about the Belgian Free Forces and knew he wanted to join up. He taught himself English by listening to gramophone records and gradually saved enough for what he knew would be a long, difficult and dangerous trip.

In December 1942, two months after turning 17, he set off on a perilous journey through occupied France. A passeur took him across the Spanish border and gave him the name and address of a contact. It turned out to be false. Léon had barely set foot in Figueras when he was arrested. He told the police that his name was Fred Kirkup and that he was British. That didn't cut much ice and he was thrown into an overcrowded cell.

A British Consular Officer came to see him and of course wasn't for one second taken in by Léon's claims to be a subject of King George. But the diplomat did his duty. "Of course, this fine fellow's British. Release him now!" He took Léon to Barcelona, gave him new clothes and a false passport which allowed him to travel on to Madrid, where Léon was questioned again, and then on to Gibraltar.

In April 1943, Léon boarded a convoy ship bound for Liverpool. Despite coming under attack from German stukas, they made it to Britain in one piece.

Transferred to London, Léon was interrogated for days as a possible spy before being ordered to present himself at the Belgian Embassy.

"But I'm Swiss", he reminded them. The Swiss Embassy informed Léon that his parents had been worried sick, trying to track down their teenage son. After refusing a one-way ticket to Zurich, Léon pleaded with his father Armand to let him serve in the military.

He enlisted in the Belgian section of the Royal Air Force and was sent for initial training in Yorkshire and then in Saskatchewan, Canada, where he won his wings in early 1945.

Demobbed in 1946, he decided to follow in his father's footsteps in the watch business. But he missed flying.



After finally acquiring Belgian citizenship, he served as a squadron auxiliary in the Belgian air force from 1949 to 1957, ending his career at the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel Aviateur.

It was through the air force that Léon met his wife-to-be, Rayky, at an aviation ball. Her mother, Lambertine, was a member of the Comète Resistance network. She was betrayed and died at Bergen-Belsen in April 1945.

These painful memories did not prevent Léon and Rayky finding happiness. They married in Britain and had three children, Léon-Philip, Ingrid and Marion. Sadly, Léon-Philip died in 2018, just four years after Rayky passed away.

Léon retired at 65 but remained very active. When he was 73, he took his first parachute jump, with his 17-year-old grand-daughter Audrey.

When he was 90, Léon suggested they do it again. And they did.

Léon recently told his daughters he wanted to make another parachute jump – when he was 100 in 2025. Sadly, it was not to be.

Marion said she'd remember her dad as a tough yet humble man with a "great, great sense of humour" who made her laugh all the time. In a message to Andrée shortly before Léon passed away, Ingrid wrote of how important the RAFA Belgian Branch had been to her dad.

"Now he is preparing for his last flight," she said.

We will remember him.

Alain Marie-Jeanne

Alain joined the RAF in September 1969 in the Supply Branch in the rank of Senior Aircraftman and served in Singapore. He was discharged in 1972 and subsequently suffered an accident that left him a paraplegic. He passed away peacefully in 2024.

Joris 'Georges' Malliet

Georges was a war volunteer 1940-1945 in the Belgian Section of the RAF. He was a Life Member of the Belgian Branch RAFA.

He was the Chair of the van de Mannen 1926 Leuven. He was awarded the Golden Palm in the Order of Leopold II and the Order of the Crown as well as the Military Honorary Badge 1st class. He was born in Oud-Heverlee on 27 March 1926 and died in Neerijse on 4 February 2025.

'Nadine' - Andrée Dumont Antoine

Andrée Dumon, alias "Nadine", who has died aged 102, was a Belgian heroine who helped save the lives of dozens of Allied airmen as a courier on the Comète Escape Line, taking evaders through checkpoints and to the southwest of France before they were escorted across the Pyrenees.

Andrée was born in Brussels in 1922 and spent six years in the Belgian Congo where her father was a physician. On return to Belgium, she was educated at the Royal Athenaeum in Uccle.

As a 17-year-old student, she was shocked and saddened at the rapid capitulation of Belgium following the German invasion on May 10, 1940. Her family soon joined the emerging resistance movement. Andrée began her resistance work in a modest way, distributing leaflets. With the encouragement of her father, she joined her elder sister Micheline in the Comète in December 1941.

Comète was a resistance group that helped Allied airman shot down behind enemy lines to escape, resistance fighters in danger of betrayal or imminent arrest and secret agents who had landed in occupied territory and had accomplished their mission. This group was co-founded by another legendary Brussels resistance woman, Andrée De Jongh, alias Dédée. The escape line ran from Brussels to Paris and on foot across the Basque Pyrenees to reach San Sebastian. Those not interned by the Spanish were taken on to Gibraltar before being returned to Britain.

Travelling on false papers, Andrée guided dozens of British, Canadian, Australian, and American airmen from Brussels to Paris, where she handed them over to the next escort. Her very young and innocent appearance, some said she looked 15 years old, were an asset but she still had to be extremely alert, ready with cover stories if questioned by police or customs officials often explaining that her companions were deaf-mutes.

The Germans soon became aware that local people were assisting airmen who had bailed out of their aircraft and the Gestapo increased its efforts to finding those helping them to avoid capture. More than 700 Comète resistance fighters were arrested, often after

betrayal. Nearly 300 of them died by execution, torture or ill-treatment in the concentration camps.

Fate struck on August 11, 1942, when Andrée and several others were betrayed by an informant. The Secret Field Police knocked at her grandparents' door, in the adjacent house. They shouted a warning, but Andrée and her parents were arrested. She was subjected to brutal beatings, threatened with execution and blackmailed with a threat to arrest her elderly grandparents.

Andrée did not break, and she was categorised under the Nacht and Nebel (Night and Fog) orders, a decree issued by Hitler targeting political activists and resistance “helpers”. Families were not aware of their whereabouts and most died in captivity.

On the deportation train from Brussels, Andrée suddenly had the chance to see her father. For the first time since their arrest. He was also being transported as a Nacht und Nebel prisoner. They were able to speak briefly, but their happiness was short-lived as it was their last conversation. Eugène Dumon died on February 9, 1945, in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp.

For Andrée Dumon, Nacht und Nebel marked the beginning of a dreadful ordeal. She was used as forced labour in the prisons of Trier, Cologne, Mesum, Zweibrücken, and Essen. She was then transferred to the Gross-Strehlitz concentration camp. There, she met Nina Vankerkhove, an acquaintance from the resistance. Together, they attempt an escape. However, within just two hours, a local farmer discovered them and informed the camp guards, and they were soon back in prison.

Andrée was subsequently deported to Ravensbrück, the concentration camp for women. From there, she was sent to Mauthausen in Austria. The journey lasted four days, in bitter cold and with hardly any food or drink. Upon arrival, she was a shadow of her former self. Completely exhausted, she collapsed into the snow. With the help of fellow prisoners, she managed to get back on her feet and limp onward, since exhausted prisoners were shot. The camp was liberated on 22 April 1945.

On May 1, 1945, Andrée was met by her mother Marie in Brussels station, their first meeting in three years. Both were shocked by each other's appearance. Marie, dressed in black, was very emaciated and looked years older. Andrée was so bad that she took two years to recover. Infested with typhoid and paratyphoid, Andrée spent the first few months after returning home in the hospital.

After the war, she married Gustave Antoine. Together they built a successful textile company and had two children. But the memories of the war and the resistance never left her. She became involved in the Royal Union of Intelligence and Action Services (RUSRA-KUIAD) and played an active role in the recognition and compensation of the Intelligence and Action Agents (IAA). Given the large number of women who were active in the Comète

network, she also fought for the recognition of female resistance fighters.

For many years, she rarely spoke of her wartime experiences. She did not break her silence until she was 70-years old. She started speaking in schools, participating in debates and television programmes and became actively committed to memorial projects. Until the age of 98, she continued to support the Belgian Intelligence Studies Centre



Over 800 airmen and 300 soldiers owed their freedom to the men and women of the Comète Line. Amongst the many airmen she assisted was RAF pilot, Robert Horsley. When his daughter Erica was born, she was given Andrée as her middle name. They remained in regular contact, and she was present at Andrée's 100th birthday. Erica commented, "Today I am honoured to carry a name that is connected to such an important part of our history."

Andrée remained in contact with many pilots and soldiers she saved and regularly invited them to Belgium. In turn, she travelled to the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States to meet them. She was a regular visitor to Britain and to the annual reunions of the Royal Air Force Escaping Society and its successor, today's Escape Lines Memorial Society.

With her unwavering courage and lifelong commitment, Andrée 'Nadine' Dumon is remembered as one of the great resistance women of Belgium.

She was highly decorated by Belgium and by France. The British appointed her OBE and awarded her the King's Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom. She was also decorated by the United States.

Andrée Dumon, "Nadine", died on January 30, 2025.

Some of the Commemorations RAFA Attended

1. **Liberation Event Sugny:** On Saturday 31 August, the Branch Secretary and SHAPE RAFALO attended a commemoration which celebrated the liberation of the town of Sugny in the Ardennes. They were joined by military representatives from the USA, France and Belgium as well as the Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium in a service to remember the sacrifice of the local resistance fighters and the 3 British crew of a 21 Sqn Blenheim, which crashed on May 14, 1940. The service of remembrance was part of a wider weekend of liberation commemorations in the town and was attended by over 1500 members of the public.



2. **Liberation Event Lierde:** On Sunday 08 September 24, the SHAPE RAFALO and local dignitaries joined the Senior National Representative at SHAPE, chiefs from the Belgian and Australian Air Forces and local residents to commemorate the liberation of the small town of Lierde. The service took place at the memorial to the crew of a 57 Squadron Lancaster (DX-P) which crashed killing six (6) of the seven (7) multinational crew on 21 Dec 1942. Wreaths were laid on behalf of 57 Sqn and the RAF Association by the SHAPE RAFALO and the Senior National Representative at SHAPE laid a wreath on behalf of the British community. Both were invited to join in a small reception in the town hall following the event which also contained an exhibition to the atrocities of the holocaust and held many items on display belonging to the crew and the aircraft DX-P.

3. **Norwegian Armed Forces Commemoration Grimbergen:** On 15 Nov 24 the SHAPE RAFALO was invited by the Norwegian Representative to NATO to the Norwegian Armed Forces Commemoration Day service at Grimbergen Airfield. The event which is held at the Norwegian Memorial commemorated the 132 Norwegian Wing who served at the airfield during WWII who played a vital part in the support of the Allied invasion of Europe. The SHAPE RAFALO and Branch Treasurer took part in the commemorative parade at the monument, laying wreaths on behalf of the RAF Association and attended a small reception thereafter.





THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION
76, rue de l’Augette, B1330 Rixensart, Belgium
Branch No: 0645
Patron: His Majesty The King

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