

ROYAL AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION (ALRESFORD & DISTRICT BRANCH)

By

Bert Jarrett

"From little acorns great oak- trees grow" is a saying appropriate to the formation of the R.A.F.A. (Alresford Branch). Two demobbed R.A.F. airmen were having a drink in the Peaceful Home in East Street and talking about old times in the Service. Len Pearce and his brother-in-law Len Dedman decided to form a Royal Air Force Association branch, to continue the comradeship experienced during the War. The Inaugural meeting was held in the old British Legion Hall in Haig Road in October 1948. By the end of the first year the membership rose to over 40, but by 1953 it had dropped to 21, and it was crisis time in 1962 when only 12 members remained. A special meeting was called to decide whether it was worth continuing, and by general consent it was agreed to carry on. With a supreme effort the 12 multiplied to 58 in the space of one year. Through the work of stalwarts Arthur Wyeth, Bill Roberts and Dick Langrish the branch won the 'Wilderness Cup' for its achievement.

The branch went from strength to strength with monthly meetings held in the Peaceful Home, East Street for approximately 30 years, until moving to the Swan Hotel with a membership of 86. The first standard was presented by the late Mrs. C. Allen in memory of her son who had served in the Royal Air Force. It was dedicated in 1951 and carried by Len Pearce. To this day Len has continued as Standard Bearer for the Branch, a duty he carries out with immaculate precision.

Over the years there have been many events and occasions. One of the first was a Battle of Britain dance in the Legion Hall in September 1949. It was so crowded people were sitting on the window sills. A raffle produced the princely sum of £21 - an impressive figure at the time. The first Annual Dinner was held in the Cricketers. Twenty five members tucked in to Steak and Kidney pudding, cooked by mine hostess, Mrs. Boniface. In the late fifties members went gliding at Lasham. The cost was £3.per person and to the best of our knowledge they all returned safely. Dances and social evenings were also held in the Old Sun Inn by permission of landlord, Cameron Black. The Sun Inn later became the home of cricket commentator, John Arlott. A memorable fund raising event in 1981 saw a very active Air Commodore Christopher Paul, already in his 70's, together with Christopher Brill, partaking in a sponsored cycle run from Alresford to Dunsford. A considerable sum of money resulted from their efforts.

Through the sixties and seventies many activities took place. The branch have participated in the Alresford & District Agricultural Show for many years and since the re-launch of the Alresford Carnival have attended most years. During the 1980's a new social committee was formed and a series of events organised. One of the first was a Tramps Ball Fancy Dress dance at the Community Centre. This was highly successful and well supported by the local Wine Circle. Further dances followed, each with varying themes. The tombolas at each dance were provided with prizes from the town's traders, resulting in welcome income for our welfare work. An Annual Christmas Draw takes place and a generous prize of a gallon of whisky has been provided by a local company for many years. One winner declared that she and her husband did not drink whisky but it would be handy when they had winter colds. Another money spinner evolved from a first plant sale producing £96. This evolved into a yearly May Fair with various stalls selling cakes, perfumes, bric-a-brac, toys and other items. In 1990 the sum of £2,470. was achieved – an all time record. Silent Auctions were another source of income with supposed junk turning into crocks of gold!

On the social side several challenges made to the Wine Circle in Darts competitions resulted in fierce encounters for the honour of winning a challenge cup. Skittles matches were arranged. The first Barbeque at Abbotsdown resulted in the Treasurer being almost set on fire. A mix up on the menu! The branch Annual Dinner in October commemorates the formation of the branch, and a Christmas dinner is organised in December. In October 1994 a party of 27 members and wives were invited to R.A.F. Odiham for a flight in a Chinook helicopter.

Wings Appeal fortnight each September sees members undertaking house to house and street collections. In 1990 a national "Reach for the Sky" Appeal marked the 50th

Anniversary of the Battle of Britain. An appeal to local companies, M.P.'s and well known personalities together with the May Fair raised record amounts. 1993 was the 75th Anniversary of the Royal Air Force and also the 50th Anniversary of the Association.

Over the 46 years of the branch's history it has been well served by its officials as shown by the following list :-

Our early patron was the late Lord Ashburton.

PADRES :- Rev Herbert Norton from Ovington. Rev Royston Such from Ropley

PRESIDENTS: Air Commodore Christopher Paul Dr
Christopher Brill
Air Chief Marshal. Sir **Alfred Earle**. Mr. John Bevan
Air Commodore Keith Monkhouse

CHAIRMEN:- Len Dedman - Ap Selwyn Roberts - Len' Pearce -Harry Baldock -
Ian Thorne - D. Sweetenham

SECRETARIES: Len Pearce - Harold Hazelgrove - Jimmy Joyce -Mrs. W. Toyne -
Mrs. M. Teale - Terry Dewis.

TREASURERS: Graham Marshall - Roy Appleton - Harold Street -Alfred Lawrance -
Dennis Darney - David Sedgley.

An outstanding member was the late Arthur Wyeth. Well known to many people in Alresford & District, Arthur was a tireless worker. He attended every fund raising event, and his house to house collections were legendary. Currently the present Chairman keeps the meetings in good order with humour and tact. Treasurer Dennis Darney has just resigned his post after more than 14 years. Dennis was no menace, but an absolute wizard with counting monies especially during Wings Week, and kept faultless accounting records.

MEMBERS OF RAFA 50TH BATTLE OF BRITAIN ANNIVERSARY



Standing-from left to right - Cyril Nugent; Bert Jarrett; Mack Spence; Dennis Darney, John Bevan; Joan Halford; Harry Baldock; George Buckby; Bert Ganfield; Len Pearce; Doris Baldock.
Seated - Derek Moore; Mrs. Chisholm; A/Comm. Chisholm; Mary Teale; A/Comm. Paul; Monica Fawcett.

Secretary Terry Dewis has doubled as social secretary for many years and has arranged all social events and outings with calm efficiency. Brian Gabriel organises the Wings Appeal collections each year with a cheerful demeanour. The careers of present members in both wartime and peacetime is a kaleidoscope of the functions of the Royal Air Force worldwide.

Chairman Derek Sweetenham opted for Air Sea Rescue or dog handling. Trained as an armourer, and finished up in Signals. George Buckby became an Instrument Repairer in 55 Squadron and served in Egypt, Italy and Greece. Air Commodore Paul, C.B., DFC, was a Squadron Leader in 1940 serving in light bombers. Monica Fawcett, M.B.E. was an ACW 2 engine fitter in 1940, made the WRAF her career in peacetime, retiring with the rank of Squadron Leader. Jimmy White was a Navigator/Wireless Operator in 101 Squadron flying Stirlings in the U.K. 1943-45. Bert Ganfield was torpedoed near Iceland, served there as a cook, before being posted to Burma where he endured the siege of Imphal. Air Commodore Rory Chisholm, C.B.E. DSO, DFC, was a Flying Officer, "one of the few", mainly operating from Middle Wallop. Micky West joined the WRAF after the Second World War and served three years in the Provo Branch Police. Air Commodore Keith Monkhouse served in the Engineering Branch for 4 years, became an operational pilot in



213 Squadron flying Canberras returned to engineering serving in Germany and the Netherlands.

Brian Gabriel did his National Service in Air Traffic Control, whilst Bert Jarrett served two years in the U.K. and three years in India responsible for fuel supplies. Mary Teale was commissioned into the WRAF and served in the Air Ministry and in Cairo. Terry Dewis was a boy entrant in the regular R.A.F. became an Engine Fitter, and was posted to the Suez Canal area in 1953. Christopher Brill served 1951-52, commissioned, and was Fighter Controller/Radar Supervisor at H.Q. R.A.F. Box. Wing Commander Brooke served in Signals in the U.K. until 1943 and then India, Burma and Malaya.

John Bevan flew in Lancasters, his plane was caught by night fighters in August 1944. It limped home but landed safely, but it meant the end of flying for John who lost hearing in one ear. Dennis Darney is lucky to be alive. One of 29 pilots training in Canada, he was one of ten retained as instructors. Of the 19 who returned for operational services, only two were still alive by 1944. Dennis became a Regular after the war, retiring in 1966. David Sedgley, a Regular, was in Air Radar on Link Trainers. Derek Moore, possibly, was the shortest serving member. An engineer, waiting to serve abroad, he caught measles, was treated with an experimental drug which impaired his health, leading to discharge in 1943.

One member, who will remain nameless, on the night of the red alert signalling a possible invasion by the Germans in September 1940, had the distinction of challenging a cow in a quiet Staffordshire country lane. He received a "moo" for his pains, and forgot to advise the guard commander of the incident,

The Alresford Branch of the Royal Air Force Association graphically illustrates life in wartime and peacetime. The author is indebted to Len Pearce for bygone recollections and regrets not being able to include more members' service careers. The monies collected support the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund, two convalescent homes and local needs. Support is also given to the local A.T.C. 1105 Winchester Squadron. All members are committed to their Dedication :-

"In friendship and in service one to another, we are pledged to keep alive the memory of those of all Nations who died in the Royal Air Force and in the Air Forces of the Commonwealth. In their name we give ourselves to this noble cause. Proudly and thankfully we will remember them".

(C). Bert Jarrett

November 1994.

Editorial Note:

As this issue is on its way to press we learn with the deepest regret that Air Commodore Rory Chisholm passed away peacefully in early December. We extend our deepest sympathy to his family and his friends of the R.A.F. Association.

