



HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY LOYALTY

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The 33 Squadron RAF Association Newsletter

Issue 16 Summer 2023

AMF
Farewell to Mike Evans
33's original 'Arctic Warrior'

Graham's
Lowe-down
to Crete
2023

Notes from the 90s: An
RCAF Exchange Pilot on
33

Groetjes

uit

Goes!

WELCOME TO OC 33
NO.73 AND SEAN J!



Puma HCl, ZA937, first flew on 24 Oct 1980. It was delivered to 33 Sqn at RAF Odiham on 28 Nov 1980. During the following 32 years of operational service ZA937 was operated by 33 Sqn, 72 Sqn, 230 Sqn and 1563 Flt. It took part in Op BANNER, Op GRANBY and Op TELIC and was based out of Aldergrove, Belize, Benson, Kuwait, Odiham and Saudi Arabia. During its service ZA937 flew for a total 12,424:25 hours and had its final flight on the 14 Dec 2012

Special! Dick & Lis's
Concise Illustrated
Battlefield Guide:
10 Days in the Low
Countries

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From the Editor...



Happy 10th Anniversary! It has been an interesting decade for the 33 Squadron Association, which was formed the year after the upgrade programme that gave us the Puma HC Mk2 commenced. Many of us thought that the Pumas' end was in sight last year, with rumours abounding about an OSD of Easter 2022, but with the recent announcement that Puma 2 has been extended in service until 2028 - or might it be 2031? - there is a very good chance that the Association's founder, FS Paul Davies, will soon be looking well ahead and designing badges and prints for our 15th anniversary in 2028.

In terms of anniversary gifts, in a marriage 10 years is marked by tin or aluminium, so cracking a tinny, pouring a drink and raising a toast to each other and the Puma, an aircraft that contains a fair amount of duralumin (as did our Hawker Harts), at the RAF Benson Friends and Families Day at the end of August seems an apt way of acknowledging how far the Association has come. Looking to the future, which appears a little more certain for now, crystal is the gift for a 15th anniversary, so my vote would be engraved whisky glasses or a decanters, something to enjoy my favourite Islay tippie from. Get your ideas in early to avoid disappointment!

It would be remiss of us if we did not extend our thanks to the new

Station Commander, former OC 33 Chris Royston-Airey, and the new OC 33, Nick Monahan, both of whom have encouraged the establishment of RAF Benson as the home of the Puma SH Force and have allowed both the 33 Squadron Association and the 230 Squadron Association to hold their AGMs here before Families Day. With an 84 Squadron Association stall being set up at Families Day the new Puma Force structure will be well represented - perhaps a sign of things to come in the future? Should we consider matching the Harrier Force and look at establishing a Puma Force or an SH Force Association? Ideas on a postcard or email please.

This edition of 'Loyalty' provides a varied set of articles for you to peruse before we meet, be it at the AGM and Families Day this week, or at other functions throughout the year. Once again they cover several key periods and events from 33 Squadron's wonderful history, while contributions from France, the Netherlands and Canada reflect our links to a global audience. In chronological terms, Graham Lowe presents us with a guide to some of the key historical sites on Crete, having visited the island again to pay his respects at Maleme. while Jan Westhoeve reminds us of our participation in the Battle of the Scheldt. I have written about the unique

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WEBMASTER

Dode Dahroug

recording of 33's tally during World War Two, inscribed on an Me.109 blade which has travelled with the Squadron from Europe to the Far East and back to England. To reflect our Puma history our President, Paul Lyall, has written a short but moving piece about the Al Faw Peninsula operation in March 2003 at the beginning of the Second Gulf

War, and the pleasure of attending the Sandbaggers Dinner at the RAF Club to celebrate the 20th anniversary of that extraordinary mission.

In the year that we witnessed England's Lionesses reach the final of the Women's World Cup 2023 in Australia, I am pleased to publish the first article written for 'Loyalty' by a female pilot - Major Sue Weicker-Forgues - now retired from the RCAF and 33 Squadron's first ever female exchange pilot. Sue was a fine ambassador of that wonderful land that has provided aircrew on 33 Squadron since 1916. She covers one of our lesser reported periods that the British Army Review's Special Report of Spring 2020 refers to as the Yugoslav Wars, and her 'musings' make an excellent read.

We have lost several friends and colleagues over the last few years, and I was saddened to report the passing of the third member of a legendary S&D Flight Puma crew from the Flight's glory years - Mike Evans. Many of us knew him as the survival instructor on AMF detachments to Norway, where he earned the nickname 'Arctic Warrior'. Along with pilot Lex Brown and crewman Geoff Bond, Mike was the navigator who made up an awesome, talented and extremely capable trio, who pushed the aircraft to the edge of its flight envelope on more than one occasion to ensure tasks were met. Mike was another larger than life character from a time when we were well blessed with such men, and to have three such characters crewed together was a unique privilege for those who knew them and flew with them - and probably a nightmare for OC33 at the time!

Mike had fought a long hard battle with muscular dystrophy, a horrible, debilitating disease, but his memorial service was a joyous event and an opportunity to remember the good times, of which there were many! On occasions such as these, the importance of loyalty to the Squadron, your friends, their families and your colleagues is renewed and I am extremely gratefully to former 33 Squadron navigator, Des Goff, for penning the 'Arctic Warrior' article about his dearly departed friend. I have followed it with a quick reminder about the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (Land) and 33's role in the Joint Force Helicopter Unit. We used to tell people that AMF stood for 'Alcohol Makes Friends' and never a truer word was spoken!!! I do wonder if that wonderful institution was

still in existence now, if NATO had accepted Ukraine's request for membership earlier, and the West still had the 'si vis pacem, para bellum' resolve that appeared more resolute back in the day, the AMF(L) would have been deployed as a statement of intent and an indicator of NATO's Article 5. Would Vladimir Putin then have dared to invade Crimea or the Ukraine?

Before I close, for the last time, I must pay tribute to the incredible fund raising epic that our treasurer, Jez Reid, put himself through over the last 6 months for Help for Heroes. Jez started walking on 1 July, and despite suffering with a viral bug, scorchio conditions, very sore feet and some truly horrible blisters, he carried a 55lb (4 stone / 25 kgs) bergen for 155.36 miles in 29 days, finishing on 29 July. He raised £789 for the charity and deserves a massive 'Well Done'. Great effort, Jez.

Well, that is me done. I could not let the 10th Anniversary pass without producing an edition of 'Loyalty', but it is time for me to step away and for someone else to step up to the plate. Having some new contributors made this edition a little easier to put together, but there are too many members sat out there expecting the Association Committee to do everything for them, instead of asking themselves what they can do for the Association. There is always so much keenness to get involved after a few beers at the Reunion, what a shame that feeling disappears on the journey home. If this Association is to continue for as long as the Puma HC Mk2 is in service, and beyond if our number plate is carried on by the NMH, you need to get involved, otherwise the Association will simply wither and die, like so many others. Look back at some of the amazing stories of people that have gone before you, the responsibility to maintain their memories now rests in your hands. Its up to you, are you up to the task? Or are you content to let it all fade away?

I am proud to be 33. Are you?

Dave Stewart

From the President...



The Events of 20 March 2003

The Americans from 39 Marine Aircraft Group (39 MAG) went over the border first, in the dark on NVG, taking 42 Commando onto the Al Faw peninsula on Day One of the Iraq conflict. The skies were overcast with the smoke from burning oil wells severely limiting visibility above 200 feet. Things went wrong.

The American helicopter formation had a pre-planned ingress height that took them into worsening visibility. A Ch-46 crew lost references in the tactical formation and crashed, causing the loss of four US Marine Corps aviators and eight Royal Marines. The assault was aborted.

Seven Royal Air Force Pumas were standing by in a desert location as the Divisional Reserve, ready to enter the fray. A plan was rapidly drawn up: we would conduct the assault at dawn, using the procedures that we had learned with 16 Air Assault Brigade - fly the loop until there is no one left to carry.

The mission was accomplished easily, at very low level, and over several hot and sweaty hours. It heralded an epic period for the Puma Force, with two early detachments sent forward into Iraqi territory. But the memory of that first morning is special and rests with all the aircrew that took part.

The Events of 11 March 2023

The Puma aircrew that took part in the initial assault on the Al Faw peninsula in 2003 formed very close and personal bonds. These bonds were formed out of the shared experience of going to war, of jumping into the unknown, taking shared risks, standing shoulder to shoulder with friends, and getting a professional job done without loss. If you've done it, you will understand.

The closeness of the collective bond was illustrated on 11 March in the RAF Club, London. Almost all of the original group of aircrew came back together for dinner. Stories were told, embellished, and probably invented. Toasts were raised to absent friends. What was special was the feeling that, whilst 20 years had passed, we were still very closely connected by our shared experience of that first morning and the events that followed. The individual importance of the bond was illustrated by the lengths that friends went to get to the dinner, including flying in from the US, India, the Middle East, Brunei, and other far-flung places.

It was like we had never been apart.

Reflections

The first thing to say is that launching into the unknown can be both exhilarating and dangerous. Having come out of a period of campaign operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and entering a period of forward basing in Cyprus and Brunei, it might be difficult for today's Puma aviators to envisage jumping quickly into an as yet unknown conflict. Planning for such eventualities requires a really open mind and an innovative support team. Things will go wrong: how the team and individuals react to difficulties and setbacks will be crucial. Judging when and where to take risk, understanding when to push forward and when to hold back is probably the key leadership skill: not just in the nominated leader but ingrained across the organisation.

The second thing is to avoid underestimating how much team and individual morale needs to be built and maintained in advance of such eventualities. Professional training is essential, but it is just the start. Understanding human emotions, building groups of people that will support each other, take responsibility, and stand fast together is an age-old military skill we ignore at our peril.

Having been privileged to be part of such a group, I will be forever grateful.

LOYALTY

Gulf War Two: The Al Faw Peninsula Operation

20-24 March 2003

MISSION

The 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines (3 Cdo Bde) mission to seize intact the oil infrastructure on Iraq's Al Faw peninsula was crucial to the coalition's overall campaign plan. Failure could have enabled Iraqi sabotage, leading rapidly to a major environmental disaster in the northern Gulf. Moreover, the oilfields were crucial to the subsequent reconstruction of the Iraqi economy. Near the base of the Al Faw peninsula the oil passes through a distribution station and four large pipelines that emerge briefly on the beach before running along the seabed to feed gas/oil platforms 25 miles offshore, where deep sea oil tankers take it on board. This infrastructure was a strategic target for the coalition.

A key part of the campaign plan was to secure the Al Faw peninsula to provide land flank protection to the Mine Counter Measures Task group as it conducted mine clearance operations in the Khawr Abd Allah waterway in order to open the sea route to Umm Qasr, which 3 Cdo Bde also needed to seize simultaneously. As Iraq's only deep water port, Umm Qasr would be the essential hub for delivery of humanitarian aid.

Pressure on airport and seaport facilities in Kuwait due to the massive US troop build-up made an amphibious assault on the Al Faw particularly attractive, since it is Iraq's only coastline, and the forces involved could be held, launched and supported from the sea, thereby exploiting Iraq's maritime flank. 40 Commando Group sailed to theatre as part of the Royal Navy's Amphibious Task Group with helicopters embarked and the logistics necessary to support the Brigade ashore. The remainder of 3 Cdo Bde moved by air direct to Kuwait, and established in concentration areas in the desert to train, plan and rehearse. 3 Cdo Bde HQ, 40 and 42 Cdos, along with 29 Cdo Regiment RA, 59 and 131 Cdo Engineer Squadrons and other Brigade troops were all committed to the operation.

This was a joint operation, spanning the areas of responsibility of the sea, land and air component commanders. It was also a 'combined' operation with the United States, under overall US command. To provide the necessary force simultaneously to capture Umm Qasr, the US Marine Corps (USMC) placed its 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15 MEU) under command of 3 Cdo Bde, demonstrating the mutual respect developed between the Royal Marines and the USMC over many years. The Al Faw operation was a

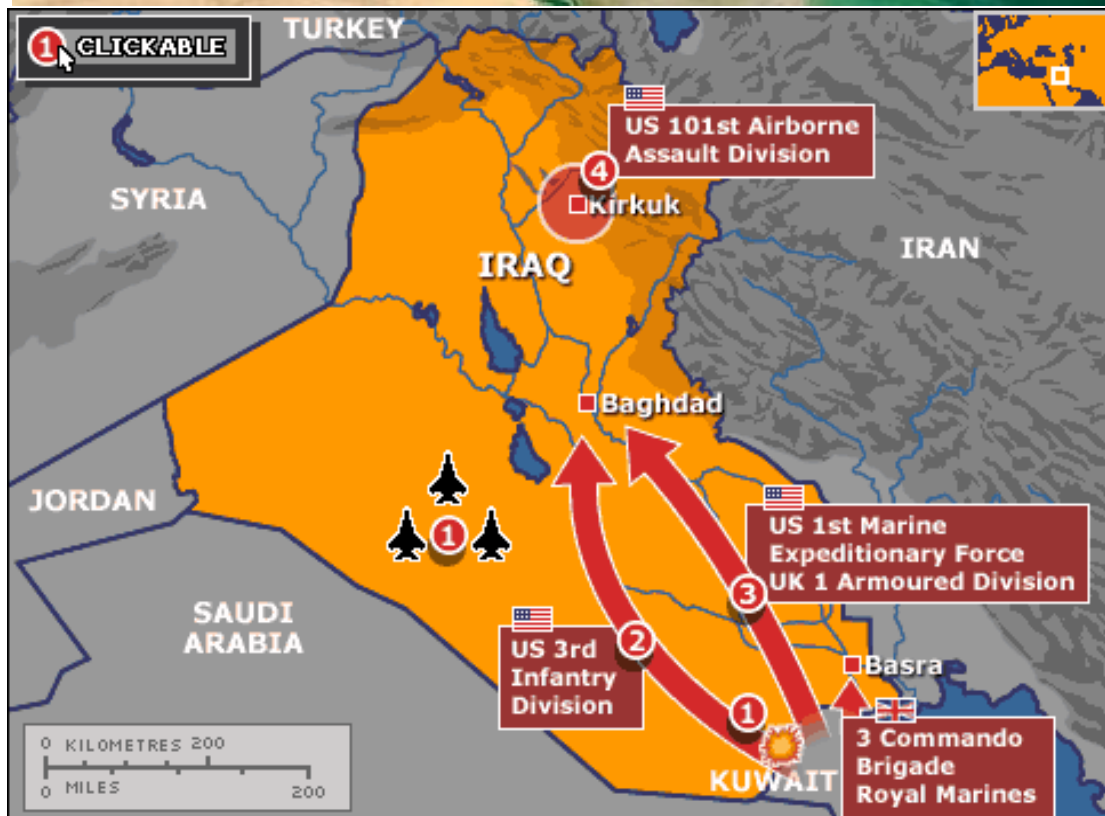
classic amphibious night helicopter commando assault and, as the first conventional ground force action of the war, had immense strategic significance.

EXECUTION

On the night of 20 March 2003 the men of 3 Cdo Bde waited in Kuwait and on ships in the Gulf, ready to embark in over 80 helicopters to launch the assault. After days of bad weather, with low cloud and blown sand, the weather and light conditions were touch and go, but the strategic imperative to seize the oil infrastructure intact meant there was no scope for delaying the launch options. The start of operations was set for 2200 local time and was preceded by a short but intense air bombardment onto known enemy positions, combining the effect of Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) dropped from US FA-18s with the firepower of AC-130 Spectre gunships. 40 Cdo and US forces landed as planned on their three strategic objectives, capturing some 230 prisoners for no loss. Meanwhile, simultaneous landings from air and sea were made onto the gas/oil platforms out to sea.

With the best part of an Iraqi Army armoured division known to be based in and around Basrah, it was vital to ensure that no counter-attack could be mounted to threaten 40 Cdo's tenuous foothold on the peninsula. A second aviation assault by 42 Cdo in USMC helicopters was planned to launch an hour after 40 Cdo. Preceded by Cobra helicopter gunships to sweep their landing sites, 42 Cdo was to land just north of the town of Al Faw, destroying the enemy artillery which threatened the oil infrastructure, thereby securing 40 Cdo's flank. For an hour and a half, the landing sites were subjected to an intense bombardment by artillery and naval gunfire from four artillery batteries (three UK and one US) positioned on the eastern edge of Bubiyan Island, and from three UK ships (HMS RICHMOND, HMS MARLBOROUGH and HMS CHATHAM) and an Australian ship (HMAS ANZAC).

42 Cdo's insertion started badly in appalling visibility, made worse by blowing sand and smoke from fires started the previous day. Tragically, the US CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter carrying the headquarters of the Brigade Reconnaissance Force crashed as the assault formation turned out over the Brigade assembly area to start their run in over the sea. With the cloud base dropping still further, the insertion was aborted, forcing the Brigade HQ rapidly to identify other aviation assets and plan a new insertion for 42 Cdo at



1: US and British forces advanced into southern Iraq, after launching an intense artillery attack across the Kuwaiti border. US Marines reached Iraq's only deep-water port at Umm Qasr in the south-east, having overcome some early resistance. British troops took control of key oil installations on the al-Faw peninsula. There was fierce fighting around the big oil fields in northern Iraq as US special forces tried to secure them. Baghdad came under heavy aerial bombardment.

2: US 3rd Inf Div with approx. 250 main battle tanks pushed into SW Iraq with the aim of moving swiftly north towards Baghdad.

3: US 1st MEF and UK 1 Armd Div ground troops and armour crossed into S Iraq in a second offensive, with marines from the UK's 3 Cdo Bde occupying the strategically important southern city of Basra.

4: US 101st AB Div captured the strategically important city of Kirkuk and secured the oil fields. The US had wanted to station about 60,000 troops in Turkey with the aim of carrying out a full scale ground invasion, but the plan was blocked by the Turkish Government.

dawn, using RAF Chinook and Puma helicopters. Although the landing took place six hours late, onto insecure landing sites, and in some cases miles away from those originally intended, all objectives were secured, demonstrating 3 Cdo Bde's, and the RAF's SH Force's, inherent flexibility.

Meanwhile, early that morning, 15 MEU crossed the border into Iraq, bypassing the town of Umm Qasr as planned, to seize the port area, before pushing north up the western side of the Khawr Abd Allah waterway. They encountered some stiff resistance as they advanced, particularly from the irregular Saddam Fedayeen, but nevertheless made excellent progress and achieved all their critical objectives ahead of time.

The initial plan had always depended heavily on helicopters, both to insert the force and then sustain it. In an effort to reduce dependence on aviation, engineers operating from the shore and mine clearance divers, inserted by hovercraft from the sea, worked against the clock to try to clear a beach on Al Faw (Red Beach) large enough to land the light armour. This option had to be abandoned at first light when the scale of mining became apparent, and the risk to the heavy US Navy hovercraft carrying UK Scimitars was deemed too high. C Squadron Queen's Dragoon Guards, who had been pre-loaded onto hovercraft on board USS RUSHMORE for the landing, had to be landed back in Kuwait. They finally crossed the waterway north of Umm Qasr some 24 hours later to take up their screen positions on the exposed salt marshes south of Basrah.

Overall, the Brigade's operation was completely successful. The level of resistance put up by the enemy proved to be less than expected. Nevertheless, as final preparations were made on 20 March in the tactical assembly area to launch the assault, there had been attacks by Iraqi missiles. The Brigade fully expected to be subjected to chemical attack and the helicopters to be engaged by air defence artillery. It was also anticipated that there would be determined resistance on the ground, which the Brigade did encounter at local level from some determined and fanatical fighters. However, although the Iraqi armed forces mounted several armoured attacks out of south-east Basrah, their defeat stemmed from their inability to put together a co-ordinated defence. This failure can be attributed to the surprise engendered by the speed and force of the coalition's initial assault. The all-arms co-operation between the Commando Groups and the MEU, the ships and helicopters from the

Amphibious Task Group, the tanks and other elements of 1 (UK) Armoured Division, and the AC-130 Spectre gunships and coalition Close Air Support sorties that all supported the amphibious operation provided useful lessons for the all-arms approach to littoral operations.

Following this initial operation onto the Al Faw and into Umm Qasr, 3 Cdo Bde advanced and was involved in a series of engagements, including an assault by 40 Cdo on the Abu Al Khasib suburb in south-east Basra, which helped precipitate the fall of the city.

THE IRAQ WAR

On 9 April 2003 resistance in Baghdad collapsed, and US forces took control of the city. On the same day Basra was finally secured by British forces, having entered the city several days earlier. The Turkish government refused US armoured and mechanized units access through Turkey in to the north of Iraq, resulting in US paratroopers and Special Forces dropping into the region to assist Kurdish peshmerga fighters to seize Kirkuk on 10 April and Mosul on 11 April. Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit fell on 13 April. US President George Bush declared an end to major combat on 1 May 2003. After a long hunt, Saddam Hussein was captured on 13 December 2003 and executed on 30 December 2006.

Britain had initially deployed 46 000 troops to the Gulf in 2003, and the British combat forces based primarily in Basra were withdrawn in July 2009, leaving behind RN advisors to train the Iraqi Navy until May 2011.

The continuing US presence in Iraq was never popular with the public and several political factions, leading to guerilla warfare, widespread sectarian killings and civil unrest. With ever increasing casualties, the US military formally declared the end of its mission at a ceremony in Baghdad on 15 December 2011.

From the Chairman...

Well, who would have thought it, the 33 Squadron Association is celebrating its tenth Anniversary! How time flies! I remember as if it was yesterday Paul Davies speaking to me at a Puma Reunion circa 2012 with his idea to form a 33 Squadron Association. My memory might be hazy, but Paul also spoke to Paul Lyall, a former 33 Squadron OC and Air Commodore, at the Reunion to ask if he would become president to which he readily agreed.

My thanks to Paul who was the absolute driving force for the Association's inception and he is still very much one of the main driving forces on the committee and a mainstay in several capacities regarding the Association's administration and activities. My thanks must also go out to Jez Reid, Neil Scott and Dave Stewart who have all ensured that the Association continues to move forward and grow.

It's been an amazing year for the Puma and all of us who served back in the day could not have predicted that the Puma would amass over fifty years' service, and as Dave Stewart has alluded to in his editorial there are rumours circulating that it might go on until 2031! Just like COVID, the Out of Service (OSD) extension and the deployment of the Puma Force to Brunei and Cyprus had a major impact on committee meetings and AGM dates, simply because the workload that was placed on Paul, Neil, Jez and Dave in their daily RAF and contractor roles, which for some involved long visits to Cyprus and Brunei, plus having to deal with family bereavements and life in general!!

All of the members who attended the Tower of London visit in April with their family and friends concluded it was a fantastic visit so I would implore all members to attend the next visit if possible, planning is under way. On a sadder note, this year is somewhat bittersweet as on the 14th of October, in Buckingham, we will be remembering the 20th anniversary of Will Lovelocks' passing. If you would like to attend, please contact the Association soonest. There has already been a huge response which has been heartening in respect to Will and the fondness in which he is remembered.

In November the Association will be marching for the seventh year at the Cenotaph, and all those who have participated in the Remembrance Sunday march past agree that it is a fantastic and deeply moving experience. Again, I must give a special vote of thanks to Jez Reid and his efforts from the outset of this initiative> The administrative burden of getting us all

registered for the big day is considerable and time-consuming, so thank you, Jez.

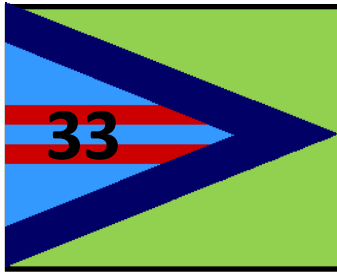
As I appear to be discussing Association events for the future, let me say that on or around 12 January 2024 we would like to hold another 33 Squadron Association function to celebrate the founding of No. 33 Squadron RFC on 12 January 1916 at Bristol Filton aerodrome. We will promulgate more details later this year.

The committee is also discussing the resurrection of the Battlefield tour to look at 33 Squadron's role in Operation VARSITY - the Allied crossing of the Rhine on 24 March 1945 - which had to be cancelled in 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID pandemic.

Finally, the committee and I are looking forward to seeing you at the AGM on 31 August before the RAF Benson Families day, if you can attend, or at the Cenotaph or the Puma Reunion in London in November.

LOYALTY

Dicky Brewster



From the Hart... Step forward Monners!



Wing Commander N J B Monahan MSc RAF
- 33 Squadron's latest commanding officer.
Many congratulations, Sir, and welcome!

Those taking command invariably speak of the honour and the privilege, and rightly so, but for me being appointed as the Officer Commanding No. 33 Squadron, which also encompasses the new Deputy Puma Force Commander role, the appointment is something else again! The Puma Force looks rather different to when I was last a member; that my command now includes 84 Squadron and 230 Squadron makes it even more special.

As many of you know, 33 was my first squadron and it was a highly memorable time. After two tours on 33 and some staff purgatory at the Joint Helicopter Command (JHC) Headquarters I returned to Benson as a Flight Commander on our beloved sister squadron. I have to confess I also had a great time as a tiger, especially with all of the Squadron Centenary events we managed, alongside RAF100. I was also a Holding

Officer on 84 Squadron after Initial Officer Training – it is another squadron with an incredibly rich heritage.

Whilst there has been some upheaval for the Puma Force over the past few years, some things have undoubtedly endured – it is still full of great people, the collective dedication remains palpable, and a fantastic team spirit exists. It is still an excellent aircraft too, which I have really enjoyed flying again (though fair to say I probably peaked on Puma Mk1!).

The achievements during Sam Fletcher's tenure are astonishing. Mere months from the Puma's scheduled Out of Service date (OSD) of 31 March 2022, with many key personnel already departed, the glorious decision was made to pull the Puma from the fire once again! With its typical devotion to duty and total professionalism, the Force got down to planning and

executing an enormous task. Nine months later they were conducting life-saving missions in Brunei (as 1563 Flight at that point) and on 31 March this year Puma replaced the Griffins of 84 Squadron in Akrotiri, Cyprus. As a proud rotary man, and Puma through and through, it is wonderful to see it proving its versatility yet again and delivering the goods in far flung places. The icing on the cake came with the Chief of the Air Staff's decision to re-badge the Brunei deployment as 230 Squadron, which formally took place during my handover visit last month. My eternal thanks to Sam and countless others for this remarkable feat.

So, 33 Squadron is all that remains of the Puma Force at Benson, though its role is absolutely integral to the sustainment of our overseas operations. Whilst still in draft, the Squadron's new mission is to 'enable, support and assure Puma operations in the UK and worldwide'. A small HQ Flight works primarily in support of my Deputy Force Commander role, and in conjunction with Benson's Support Helicopter Force Headquarters (SHFHQ) will play its part in fulfilling this mission. The Squadron's engineering cadre play an equally vital role: they directly support 84's and 230's activities in various ways, whilst also generating aircraft for the Operational Conversion Unit (OCU) and

remaining UK crews, in order to ensure aircrew sustainment and resilience. A limited UK tasking capability will also be maintained ... no Royal flypast would be the same without us!

Though our initial focus is to deliver the Full Operating Capability (FOC) in both locations, and ensure we can sustain it thereafter, we must have one eye on the future. Defence has taken the decision to extend the Puma OSD until 2028, though I suspect we won't have the luxury of five years of certainty and stability! The New Medium Helicopter (NMH) programme should start to take shape soon, and perhaps other platforms will be considered to relieve us of duties in Cyprus and Brunei earlier than 2028.

Whether or not this is the final part of the Puma chapter in 33 Squadron's illustrious history, rest assured that the Squadron's past endeavours and members remain close to our hearts. We don't have quite the same organisational horsepower that we have had previously but the ethos is as strong as ever, and I am looking forward to events to come that will bring past and present members together.

LOYALTY



Wing Commander Sam Fletcher handed over command to Wing Commander Nick Monahan on 24 May 2023, making Nick 33 Squadron's 73rd commanding officer since Major Philip Joubert de la Ferté formed the Squadron at Filton aerodrome on 12 January 1916. Thank you Sam and our best wishes for the future. Good luck Nick!

From our special friend, Jan, and his wife, Renate, in Zeeland...

Groejtes uit Goes!



Dear 33 Squadron Association members,

First of all, I would like to congratulate you on the tenth anniversary of the Association. This is the story of how I got involved with the 33 Squadron Association and what we all did together.

First a short introduction of myself - Jan Westhoeve, retired RNLAf sergeant major and a communication and information technician / instructor who served with the Guided Missile Group from 1984 till 2000. I was stationed at Blomberg in Germany and Venray in the Netherlands and I was an Instructor from 2000 till 2011 at Airbase Woensdrecht. I have been a Battlefield Tour guide, specializing on the Battle of the Scheldt, since 2015.

On April 18, 2016, this email was forwarded to me:

*"Good afternoon,
My name is David Stewart and I am a committee member of the No33 Squadron RAF Association. Our Squadron bears 'Walcheren' as a Battle Honour on its Standard and I am enquiring about a Battlefield Tour around the Scheldt in 2017.*

Next month we will be in Crete for the 75th Anniversary of Operation Mercury, as our Squadron was evacuated from Maleme airfield. In June we will hold our Annual General Meeting, where I would like to suggest the Walcheren tour to the members and find out how many would be interested. Could you provide me with some ideas of costs and duration.

MVG

David Stewart "

After that I had a lot of email traffic with Dave about the Tour in Zeeland and searched for information about George Roney and the actions of 33 Squadron during the Battle of the Scheldt

Later, Chris Perkins also came also in the picture with a lot of information, so an awful lot of information was emailed back and forth.

At one point I also learned that a Dutch pilot was flying with 33 Squadron, namely Jan Linzel . Upon further investigation about this man, I also happened to find out his address. He lived in Ireland. The same year, a two man delegation from the Association flew over to



visit Jan on his birthday: OC 33 Squadron, Andy Baron, and Dave. (see photo, above).

In June 2017 the battlefield tour took place, with members of the Association and a number of engineers from 33 Squadron. The group retraced 33 Squadron's first spell in Europe in 1944, starting in France and then making their way up to Zeeland.

Dave Stewart had managed to make contact with a family member of George Roney in New Zealand and when the family learned of the Association's tour two of them - Rob Roney, George's nephew, and his wife, Trish - flew in from New Zealand to join us all on the tour. I had planned to meet up in Knokke, Belgium at the 'For Freedom Museum' and then, in the afternoon, go to the crash site of George Roney and afterwards pay a visit to George's grave in Schoondijke. (see report in Loyalty, Issue nr 7).

To my great surprise there were many people there when we arrived, including the press. I was flabbergasted, that was not expected by me. I had simply asked the Dekker family if we could access the field where George crashed, and asked the council of Sluis if we were allowed to hold a small commemoration service for George at his grave. So this all was taken over by the Dekker family, the local Council and the church in Schoondijke, and they did a remarkable job. There was a flypast at the crash site and I know some of you have fond memories of the coffee and 'bolus' after the memorial service! I think the day was a great success. (Ed. Yes, it was!)

The next day we all did the battlefield tour through Walcheren, with Rob and Trish Roney as my passengers. In the evening my wife, Renate, and I took the Association members and the Roneys to a Chinese restaurant in my hometown of Goes. That is where Dave Stewart awarded me with my 'Associated Membership' certificate, later upgraded to your first 'Honorary Member', and a (decommissioned) WW2 hand grenade!

On the third day we all went to the CWGC cemetery in Bergen op Zoom where we said goodbye to each other. Oh, by the way, Renate still regrets that she was not with us for those first two days! She accompanies me on most of my tours now.

After that I stayed in contact with Dave and Chris, we carried out more research about the Dutch pilots who flew with 33 Squadron, and I acquired more knowledge about 33's long history. In September 2019 Renate and I met Dave, Chris and David Coombes again. They were preparing a World War One tour and we agreed to have another commemoration service for George Roney in Schoondijke (Loyalty Issue 11, Autumn 2019). In October 2019 Renate and I met up with the Association in Ieper (Ypres) and were entertained by the pipes and drums of the London Scottish Regiment



Bolus, een Zeeuwse specialiteit..and delicious!



Jan, our first Associate, later Honorary, Member.



The Pipes & Drums of the London Scottish Regiment.

before making our way to watch the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate. Later we had a dinner together in a restaurant where Chris always eats with his tour guests.

The next day we drove up to Schoondijke and had the commemoration for George - in very rainy weather. Fortunately it stayed fairly dry at the crash site, where I also presented a plaque for George to the Alderman of Sluis and the Association, to be placed on permanent display near the crash site once planning permission had been granted by the Sluis council. I must admit that once the photos had been taken I took the plaque back off the Alderman 'for safe keeping'!

For the service we drove over to the church in Schoondijke. After a well-attended commemoration in the church, the presentation of a print to the pastor by Dick Brewster, and a final visit in torrential rain to George's grave in the pouring rain, we all left for home. Renate and I went home the happy recipients of Operation Manna 2, with a lot of vinegar, mushy peas, porridge, crisps, shepherds pie and curry mixes (we miss that !), Irn Bruand a book about Hitler's bunker.

AND THEN THERE WAS THE COVID PANDEMIC....the whole world was on hold. So a book presentation in Sluis to launch 'Air War Above Zeeland Part 3:Zeeuws-Vlaanderen' was cancelled, and all the things we had planned for that 'VIEL IN HET WATER' (fell in the water). Some books and a painting Renate and I wanted to present to the Association are still at our home. Fabricating a pole as a support for the plaque and actually placing the plaque at the site was delayed (Loyalty Issue 13, Autumn 2020). On 6 October 2020 we finally revealed the plaque but sadly it was without officials and all the bells and whistles. The memorial site can be seen here: <https://www.tracesofwar.com/sights/136463/Memorial-George-Roney.htm>.

In the following years we have all had to deal with Covid measures. But until now we - Renate, me, Dave Stewart, Chris Perkins, David Coombes and Richard Brewster - have been able to maintain regular private, Association and WW2-related contact through emails, WhatsApp, Messenger and Facebook.

For 2024 I am trying to organise a commemoration service for George Roney on Saturday 6 October, to mark the 80th anniversary of his death. Please make a note of that for the Association's agenda. You must all come back and see the renovated Sherman tank on display at Westkapelle, plus there are several newly discovered bunkers in the area for you to see - I know that will please Dickie!! - and the ladies at church will be very pleased to make coffee and bolus for you all again. So with all that, Renate and I wish you a nice day at the next AGM and we hope that you enjoy the



Westkapelle, Walcheren 18 October 2021: After a considerable restoration project, the Sherman tank was placed back on the stand overlooking the gap in the dike wall through which it had arrived as part of the assault force on 1 November 1944.

Families Day afterwards. We would love to be there too one day.

Met vriendelijk groeten

Jan en Renate Westhoeve

LOYALTY



33's MESSERSCHMITT Bf 109 PROPELLER BLADE

THE STORY BEHIND 33 SQUADRON'S UNIQUE VISUAL RECORD OF ITS SECOND WORLD WAR LOCATIONS, AIRCRAFT FLOWN AND TALLY OF DESTROYED OR DAMAGED ENEMY AIRCRAFT AND MATERIEL

By Wing Commander Dave Stewart, RAF (Retd), 33 Squadron Association

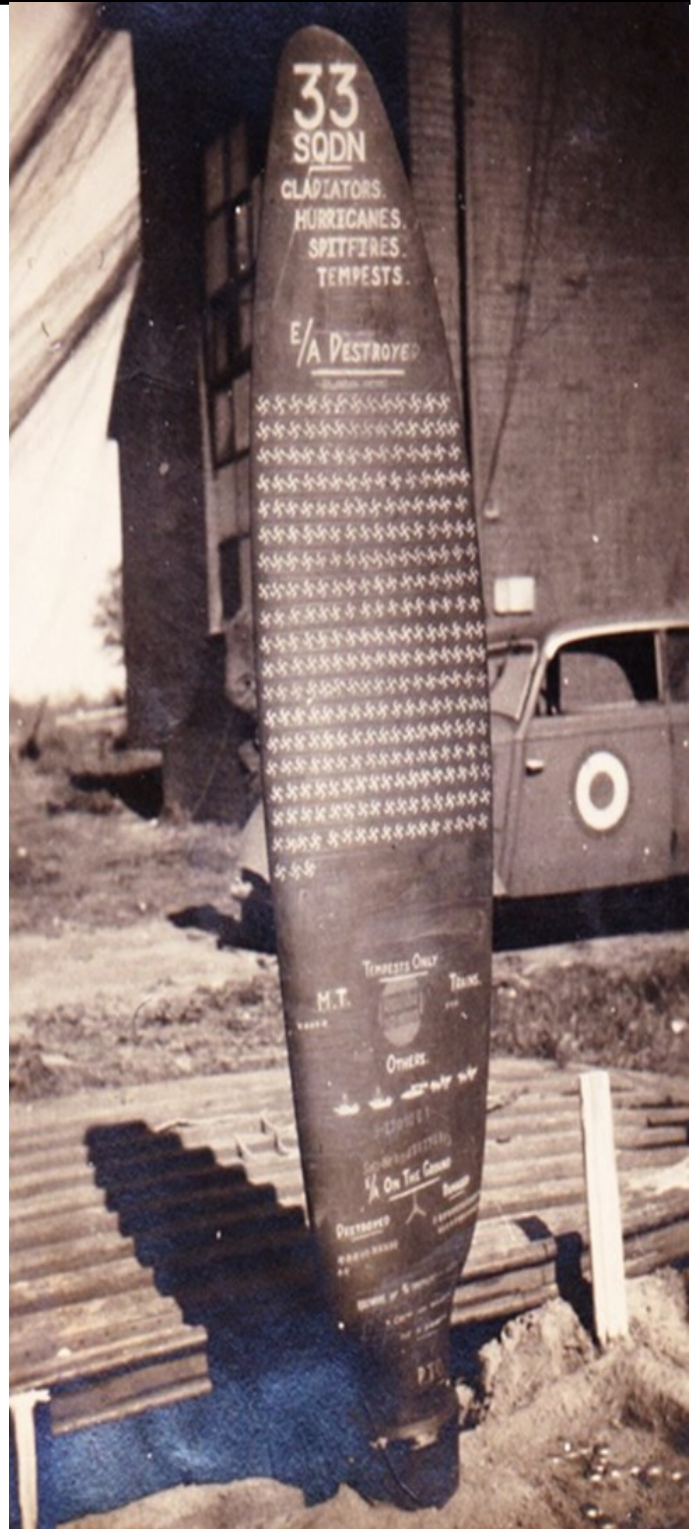
During my research for the visit of Mr Graeme Dickson to 33 Squadron on 1 March 2022, Graeme being the son of Corporal Douglas Haig Dickson, an Instrument Repairer who had served with 33 in the Western Desert and Europe from 1942 to 1945, (see Loyalty Issue 15 Autumn 21 pages 46-53), I was somewhat surprised that there was not one word about the propeller in 33's Operational Record Books (ORB). Fortunately, tucked away in the History Room, I found a file full of photos and documents donated by an engineer who had also served with the squadron from Mersa Matruh to Berlin, Mr Norman Hands, and it contained two copies of his memoirs, recounting his time with 33 in some detail. He wrote that after crossing over from the south coast of Britain to Caen in August 1944, on 2 November 33 had moved up from Merville (B53) to Maldegem (B65). Having arrived there, Norman recalled at some point that, "...*The Flight Office clerk, a tall Cockney and a bit of an artist, found a German propeller blade and made a Squadron history and record.*" That sentence had been removed from the version that I had used in a previous edition of 'Loyalty' and to date it is the only reference I have found to this extraordinary record of our wartime achievements.

There are some distinct differences between the original wartime version, shown opposite, and the version that stands in the foyer today. In the photo opposite, at the bottom of the blade, there are two boats, a V-1 flying bomb and two horse and carts; they can all be referenced in 33's ORB. In the current paint scheme, shown overleaf, the horse-drawn transport (H.D.T. - official wartime abbreviation) tally has been replaced with trucks and trains.

The E-Boats

ORB entry for 12 March 1945:

'Eight aircraft led by S/Ldr. A.W. Bower were scrambled at 10.45 to patrol & sweep area north of RHEINE in support of Mitchells and Bostons bombing targets behind enemy lines. Patrol was carried out at 10,000 ft above 10/10 clouds. One vector was given for a 'bogey' at 23,000 ft but no contact was made. No more a/c reported and our a/c landed base at 12.30 hours.



Photograph of the Bf 109 propeller blade taken by Instrument Repairer I and *Dedelstorfer / Fassberger* *Wocheblatt* compositor Corporal Douglas Haig Dickson in 1945, somewhere in Holland or Germany.

Black section (F/Lt. L.C. Luckhoff & F/O J. Linzel (Dutch) were airborne at 11.00 hours to escort one Swordfish detailed to bomb 3 enemy launches off WESTHOOFD. One of the launches ran aground and the Swordfish attacked the remaining two without success. Our 2 a/c obtained permission to strafe the launches and after being attacked twice both enemy vessels blew up! One survivor was seen in the sea. Flak was met from shore installations, but only damage to our aircraft was a small hole in Black 2's mainplane. Three air tests were carried out and squadron maintained readiness state all day, although the wing was released for 24 hours from midday. Squadron dispersals moved to site previously occupied by 35 Wing.'

Flying Officer Jan Linzel was a Dutch pilot who had flown against the Luftwaffe when they invaded the Netherlands in May 1940. He was shot down and wounded in the leg, but managed to escape to Britain later in the war. As a veteran 'Meivlieger' Jan had a biography written about him entitled 'Oorlogsvlieger' and there are rather more details in the book about events that day:

" On 9 March the Squadron carried out a sweep from our base at Gilze Rijen over the Quackenbrück-Rheine area in Germany and on 11 March I was back at work over Rheine for the second time. On 12 March the whole squadron was over the Ruhr area, where a lot of German airborne activity had been reported. That day I was sitting with Lucky Luckhoff, the South African flight commander, checking our log books and having a whinge. "Finally there is something to do and we are just sitting here!"

We were sat in the Ops Room, Rainbug's domain, when, suddenly, the Ops telephone rang. It was 1030.

"Send two cabs to Westkapelle immediately. They must be there by 1100." An Anson and a Swordfish



Current paint scheme showing two E-boats, a V-1, plus Motor Transport (M.T.) and locomotives.

busy doing photographic reconnaissance along the Dutch coast needed protection so we would fly over them. We were the only two available on the squadron. So we set off to get everything ready, complaining: "Just our luck, a bloody stooge job."

We started up at 1055, we would never have got there on time. At 1110 we were over Westkapelle and we saw the Anson and Spitfire circling. After we contacted them they took up a course towards Voorne-Putten that ran parallel to the coast. We had gone about 5 kms along the coast when we saw three black dots on the water - *Schnelle Boote* - German E boats.



25 February 1945: Flight Lieutenant Leslie 'Lucky' Luckhoff, with flak damage. (See page 4).



Flying Officer Jan Linzel

They were heading towards Schouwen-Duiveland. The Anson threw out a smoke flare so we could check the wind direction, after which the Swordfish dropped three small bombs. All three missed so the Swordfish pilot called us up and said, "Can you have a crack at them?"

At that time we were no longer allowed to attack ground targets because we had suffered a lot of losses.

"We are not allowed", said Lucky.

"Shoelace Black, this is Longbow, go ahead, attack!"

The call came from Ground Operations over towards Antwerp and 'Shoelace' was our call sign.

We saw how the three boats had fanned out and were trying to get away at full speed. One boat had gone north, one had gone southwest, and the third was heading towards Schouwen-Duiveland. The latter boat, having seen us closing in, ran onto the beach. He must have been badly damaged because he was going flat out when he ran aground. There was a lot of flak there too, so Lucky said, "Let him go, he's finished." and we turned back out to sea.

Lucky fired first at number two and I saw the boat come to a stop. After that I fired and managed to get a concentrated burst at it. We had four 20 mm cannons that were synchronised such that the bursts came together about two to three hundred feet ahead of the plane. I saw the boat break in two. I had destroyed the entire structure of the thing.

Lucky now went after number three. He fired and

immediately hit him, causing heavy damage. I went in after him and once again I managed to get a good concentrated burst on the boat and watched it sink very slowly into the ice cold water. We saw the Jerries swimming. At the time you didn't really care. Any feelings of compassion came much later, of course. We were simply doing our job, so at the time you didn't think about things like that. Of course, those people would never have been able to reach the coast again. They had been sunk about six miles out from the shore. In March the water was around six degrees so they didn't stand a chance.

After the encounter with the '*Schnelle Boote*' I noticed that I had sustained a direct hit. My right wing had two holes in it. Meanwhile the squadron had returned from the Ruhr and had met no opposition at all. In the following days we made sweeps over Quackenbrück, Twente, Rheine and Munster."

The V-1 'Doodlebug'

The RAF's operational codename for missions attacking V-1 flying bomb storage, manufacturing or launch sites was 'Noball'. There are thirty three references to 'Noball' missions in 33 Squadron's ORBs between 24 May to 25 August 1944, mainly escort duties for large Bomber Command formations attacking the V-weapons' launch and storage sites.

In the entries from 21 to 28 February 1945 there are several references to doodlebugs launched against Antwerp passing overhead when the Squadron was



based at Gilze Rijen. The actual shooting down of 33's one and only V-1 was recorded on 28 February 1945:

'Seven aircraft were airborne at 10.00 hrs led by F/Lt G.L. Starkey (RCAF) on armed recce, around ZWOLLE-ARNHEM-UTRECHT area. No locomotives presented themselves but M.T. was shot up and four were damaged. 50+ troops were strafed. Later on F/L. G.L. Starkey intercepted a doodlebug but his guns refused to fire more than a ½ sec burst, but F/Sgt Nisbet C.P. proceeded to shoot it down and the doodlebug exploded on the ground near Apeldoorn. All aircraft landed at base at 11.40.'

Horse Drawn Transport (H.D.T.)

The ORB records that horse drawn transport or vehicles were attacked on 9, 10, 11 and 17 April 1945 when 33 was based at B. 91 Kluis.

Trains, Vehicles and Motor Transport (M.T)

There are many references made in the ORBs between 2 June 1944 until 26 April 1945 which record bombing and strafing attacks against MT, staff cars, locomotives, trains and wagons, plus aircraft on the ground, with many targets either destroyed, set on fire (a 'flamer') or damaged. There are ninety-one recorded entries for MT, two staff cars, thirty-three locomotives or trains, and six wagons. Specific references to MT and locomotives actually being destroyed during the period above were thirteen and five respectively, which leads me to think that none of the results of bombing and strafing of Italian and German positions and convoys that 33 carried out in the Western Desert and Greece from June 1940 to May 1944 appear on the Me 109 blade.

Enemy Aircraft Destroyed

There are 291 swastikas on the propeller, and Lance 'Wildcat' Wade's confirmed Me 109 kill on 4 September 1942 saw 33 reach the '200 Victories' mark. There were a few more victories before 33 settled at Benina in December 1942 to carry out convoy duties in the Mediterranean throughout 1943 and the first quarter of 1944.

Returning to Britain in April 1944 33 joined the Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB) and was used in a low-level fighter-bomber role after D-Day, supporting 1st Canadian Army's push to capture the Scheldt Estuary and open up the port of Antwerp.

Returning to Europe with their new Tempest Vs in February 1945, in time to support the crossing of the Rhine - Operation Plunder - the squadron had some more aerial victories before the war ended in May 1945.

33 Squadron Combat Reports 25 February 1945

Earlier I made reference to the flak damage that Flt Lt 'Lucky' Luckhoff's Tempest V suffered during the encounter with fifteen Me 109's on 25 February 1945, just four days after 33 had arrived back in Europe. This particular encounter accounts for four of the swastikas on the blade and these are the combat reports submitted by the CO, Ian Matthew, 'Lucky', and future OC 33, 'Bill' Bower:

S/L I. G. S. Matthew, OC 33 Squadron:

'I was leading 2 sections (7 A/C) on an offensive sweep to RHEINE, and I was flying as Red 1. We were 10 miles S.W. of RHEINE, flying N.E. when I saw 15 + Me 109's in sections of four line abreast, 200 yds ahead and about 2,000 ft below flying in the same direction. I closed in on to the port 4 and as soon as I had positively identified them I swung to starboard to attack the right hand section in order to bring Blue section up behind the rest. As we approached, the e/a broke to port, I pulled in behind the starboard section, at which time the middle section pulled round behind me. I got into a turning circle with one who broke away over the tree tops (we had lost height during the preliminary manoeuvres). I followed him for about a mile when he broke upward sharply to port. I closed to 3/400 yds and gave him a 1 second burst (1¾ rings) bits flew off the starboard wing. I pulled round and gave him another burst and saw strikes all down his port side. He pulled straight up, jettisoned the hood and baled out.'

Claim. 1 Me 109 destroyed.

F/L L. C. Luckhoff:

'I was flying Red 3 on an offensive sweep to the Rheine area. I heard the C.O. call up and saw a line of enemy aircraft breaking away to our port in sections. I followed one which was turning wide and got into a turning circle with him. After two circles he pulled away to the deck and I followed closing quickly, he pulled up to about 1,000 feet and turned to starboard, I closed to about 300 yards and giving 2½ rings on the turn I fired a short burst which hit him. He flicked over on his back and went into a dive, hitting the ground still inverted. He broke up but did not burn.

I turned back and made after another Me 109 which had broken clear of the combat, before I could close 2 other Tempests got on his tail. At this moment I saw a third break clear and went after it. Starting at about 2,000 feet I chased him down to the deck closing quickly and firing all the time. We passed over the edge of a town (ENSCHEDÉ) where intense light flak opened up. I was hit in both wings and fuselage. I got in a final burst a moment later and the enemy aircraft skidded down in a field and finished against a tree. There was

still flak about so I got out quickly and landed at Volkel.

Claim: 2 Me 109's destroyed.

F/L A. W. Bower:

I was leading Blue section on an offensive sweep to RHEINE. 10 miles SW of RHEINE, My C.O. (Red 1) reported enemy aircraft ahead. When we reached the port side of the enemy formation the whole gaggle had turned port and the port section was actually coming at us head on. I turned in behind the leading enemy aircraft and after one turn he was on the tail of Blue 3. I saw him open fire on Blue 3 and immediately afterwards I got in a 2 sec burst (1¾ rings). Blue 3 pulled away and the enemy aircraft went on in its slow port turn, losing height. I could not open fire again as I was closing too rapidly, but he continued down until he crashed in a wood about a mile away.

2. As I was about to pull out I saw tracer over my port wing so I broke starboard. The enemy aircraft broke port, into sun. I came round behind him turning, at 300

yards in a tight turn; I got in a 1 sec burst (full deflection) and saw strikes on his tail.

3. There was another aircraft on my tail so I broke off the combat.

Claim: 1 Me109 destroyed. 1 Me109 damaged.

1945-1953

At the beginning of this article I said that the propeller blade is not mentioned at all in any of the ORBs. Unfortunately there are a number of missing ORBs from April to November 1946, April 1947 to January 1948 and June 1949, the latter being the month that 33 Squadron prepared to move from Gütersloh to the Far East. We will never know if the propeller was mentioned in those missing records. There is a grainy old photograph of the propeller blade (shown overleaf), with the original paint scheme visible, in an album covering 33's time at Gutersloh (December 1947 - June 1949).



Three 33 Squadron commanding officers reunite at Gatow, Berlin, 1946.

(L to R): Squadron Leader R N G Allen (June 1946 - 3 July 1948), Squadron Leader I G S Matthew (20 August 1944 - 9 March 1945) Squadron Leader A W Bower (9 March 1945 - June 1946).

1945-1953

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The propeller went out with 33 to Malaya, and sometime between 33's arrival in the Far East on 4 July 1949 and a British Pathé film unit's arrival at Butterworth in February 1953, the propeller blade was painted with a new scheme. The new paint scheme, visible in the photo below, is the one that serving members and visitors can see nowadays, as the propeller is displayed in a glass case in the foyer of the Squadron's hangar. Who, when, where and why the 1944 design on the propeller was changed is likely to remain a mystery.

The propeller was mentioned in a report in a local Malayan newspaper on Saturday 28 November 1953. The article stated that 33 Squadron was having a short



26 February 1953 - Butterworth, Malaya: With the propeller on display outside the Ops Room, the CO, Squadron Leader C C F Cooper, briefs the six ship formation for the de Havilland Hornet flypast that was filmed by British 'Pathé Gazette' film unit that day. Footage can be seen on the Association's website in the Post War Operations section of the Timeline, accessed by clicking on the Sqn History tab.

respite that weekend after 10 days of intensive operations against Communist terrorists in the South Kedah area. The report also said that the Squadron was celebrating the fact that it had flown its 4 000th sortie in Malaya on 21 November, having arrived in country with Tempest 2's in August 1949 and flown their first operational sortie two months later. Regarding the propeller and 33's exploits in World War Two, the report said:

'...The total squadron score, which is recorded on the propeller blade of a captured German aircraft which is today kept in the crew-room, shows a total of 291 enemy aircraft destroyed in the air, ten destroyed and twenty seven damaged on the ground, as well as five trucks, three trains, two 'E' boats and a buzz-bomb - a record that this hard-hitting and versatile squadron is justly proud of.'

BACK IN THE UK

After disbanding in Malaya in March 1955, 33 returned to the UK and was reformed on 15 December 1955 as a night fighter squadron at Driffield with de Havilland Venom NF.2s.

The photograph below, showing the Bf109 blade in the corner of the room, was provided by Mike Dunwoody, who flew as part of the 33 Squadron aerobatic team led by Squadron Leader Caryl Gordon, who had taught the Duke of Edinburgh to fly and who would command 33 as a Javelin squadron from March 1962 to May 1965.

Mike said that this was the crewroom and, due to the lack of furniture, he thinks the photo was taken just after 33 had disbanded on 3 June 1957. The squadron reformed on 1 October 1957, operating Gloster Meteor NF.14s from RAF Leeming, then re-equipped with Gloster Javelins in April 1958 at RAF Middleton St George before disbanding again on 18 November 1958. From April 1965 to January 1970 33 was a Bristol Bloodhound missile unit at Butterworth in Malaya.

There are no ORBs available for the Bloodhound era, but the propellor has been on display in the crewroom from our time at RAF Long Sutton in 1971 and it is still with us now. What a story! What a record!



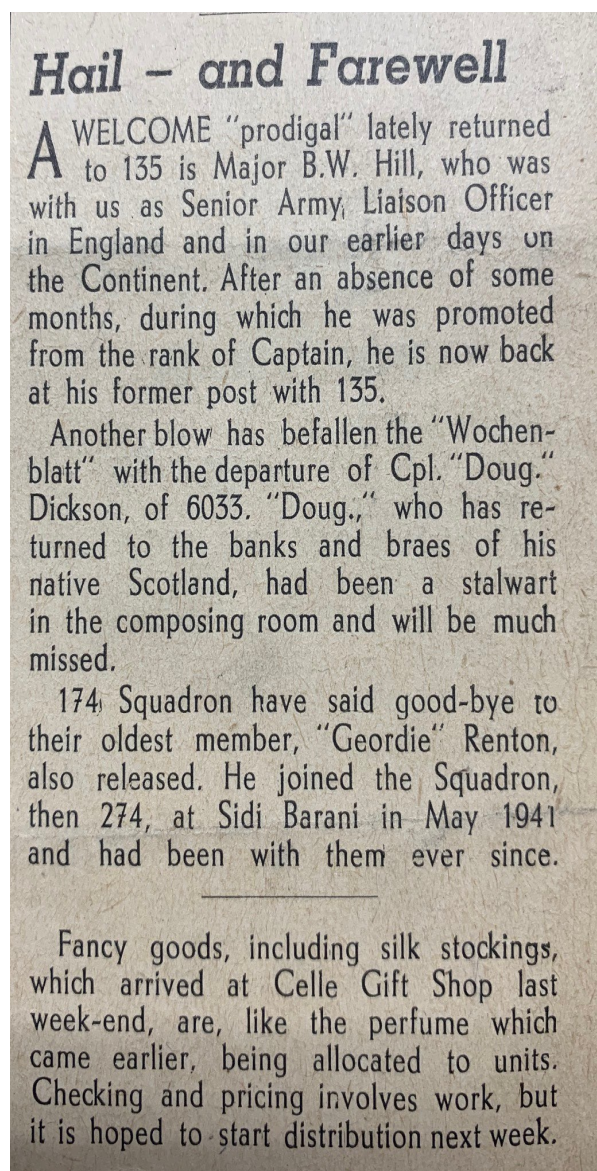
FOOTNOTE

While 33 Squadron was part of the post-war British Air Force of Occupation (BAFO) in Germany in the latter half of 1945 Graeme Dickson's father, Corporal Douglas Dickson, was able to put the skills he had learned before the war as a compositor to good use. From early July to December Douglas helped to produce a weekly newspaper for No 135 Wing, which began life as the *Dedelstorfer Wochenblatt*. In October the Wing moved to Fassberg and the paper became known as the *Fassberger Wochenblatt*. The 'Hail and Farewell' cutting opposite acknowledges the departure of Graeme's father, 'a stalwart in the composing room' back for demob and a return to 'the banks and braes of his native Scotland' to start a proper married life. Douglas returned to Britain and was 'demobbed' on 8 December 1945.

In the same cutting there is also a tenuous link to 33's time in Egypt with the reference to No. 274 Squadron. 274 was formed at Amiriya, near Alexandria, on 19 August 1940 by combining a flight of Hurricanes from 80 Squadron and C Flight of 33 Squadron, which at the time was equipped with the Gloster Gladiator Mk1. 274 followed a similar course to 33's, flying Hurricanes and Spitfires in the Western Desert before converting to Tempest Vs in August 1944 to become part of 122 Wing 2 TAF. It moved across into Europe and was based at Quackenbrück when the war ended. Having moved to Dedelstorf in June 1945 274 returned to Warmwell in September 1945 for training, where it was renumbered as No. 174 Squadron. 174 returned to Germany with the Tempest Vs and were based with 33 at Fassberg until it was disbanded on 31 March 1946.

During his visit to see the propeller that his father had photographed, Graeme Dickson very generously donated his father's collection of these rare No 135 Wing 'Wochenblatt' weekly newspapers to the Squadron. The photograph opposite shows Dave Stewart (left) and Graeme Dickson (right) with one of these rare, and extremely delicate, papers. They are so delicate that the originals were very carefully photocopied and then stored away, allowing the photocopied versions to be displayed, viewed and handled in the 33 Squadron History Room.

LOYALTY





Notes from the Nineties – Exchange Pilot Musings

including the Op GRAPPLE deployment in 1995

By Major (retired) Susan Weicker-Forgues

I was delighted when I was asked by Dave Stewart to put pen to paper (or cursor to screen) and write an article for an issue of LOYALTY, the 33 Squadron RAF Association Newsletter. My four-year tour as the Canadian exchange pilot on the Puma HC Mark 1 began in 1994 and was, undoubtedly, one of the best flying tours a Canadian Forces (CF) Huey pilot could ask for. In framing my thoughts for this article, I decided to focus on the personal aspects of my exchange and leave the discussion of tactics and the strategic deployment of Pumas to those more familiar with these important topics. Given the scope of my flying activities throughout my exchange and the myriad of places I got to visit, I decided that this article would focus on my first 18 months in the UK. During that time, I completed the UK Orientation Course (UKOC), the Puma Operational Conversion course (OCU), and deployed on Operation GRAPPLE in Bosnia. But first, allow me to introduce myself.

INTRODUCTION

It seemed somehow appropriate that I arrived in the UK to start my exchange on the 50th anniversary of D-Day – June 6, 1994. I considered it to be an auspicious start to what turned out to be a life-changing experience.

However, starting this account with my arrival in the UK leaves out a significant chunk of the story so, with your permission, I'm going to back up a few years and introduce you to Major (retired) Sue Weicker, the first female Canadian exchange pilot at 33 Squadron RAF.

Flying was not my first choice as a career. As a matter of fact, it wasn't really a choice at all when I was in high school in the late 70's. The Canadian Forces (CF) did not open pilot training to women until the early 1980's and then, it was only open to current members of the CF who wished to reclassify to pilot. It wasn't until 1985 that the pilot classification opened to women who wished to enrol directly as pilots, and in 1988,

I walked into the recruiting centre in Toronto, Ontario and began the long journey to becoming a military tactical helicopter pilot.

Attendance at Basic Officer School in April 1988 was followed by French language training as it was, and remains today, mandatory for all officers in the CF to have the ability to speak both English and French. Pilot training started the following year in March 1989 and, after logging 150 hours on the Tutor jet in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan followed by 90 hours on the Jet Ranger

in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, I earned my pilot's wings on 12 October 1990.

I had asked for, and was granted, a posting to 408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron in Edmonton Alberta. I was the first female pilot to fly Twin Hueys at 408 and, during my four-year tour, I logged nearly 1 000 hours on these amazing helos, supporting army units across three provinces and two territories in Western Canada. I also deployed on my first operational mission, spending a month in Somalia in January/February 1993, working as a liaison between the in-theatre Sea King detachment and the Airborne Regiment they were tasked to support (see photograph left).



Belet Uen, Somalia 1993: Susan with an American UH60 Blackhawk configured for Medevac

in Fort Hood Texas, only to be told that the Americans had not opened the aircraft up to women at that time, and I was therefore ineligible for the posting. However, there was potentially an exchange posting available on Pumas at RAF Odiham in the UK if I was interested. I had no clue where Odiham was nor what role the Puma had in the RAF, but I threw my hat in the ring nonetheless. Imagine my disappointment when I was told that the RAF did not currently have any female Puma pilots and were, therefore, reluctant to have a foreign exchange pilot as their first.

I heard nothing else until May 7, 1994 when, to my surprise, I was offered the RAF exchange once again. A female RAF pilot had just been posted to 33 Squadron RAF so I would not be the first female to pilot the Puma. Since I am writing this article about my exchange, you can guess that I accepted the posting, quickly packed up my life, and arrived in the UK to start what would be four of the most interesting and exciting years of flying of my military career.

RAF Shawbury... or 'How to Fly in UK Airspace'

My first stop after my arrival in England was at RAF Shawbury for the UK Orientation course (UKOC). The course was taught on a Gazelle helicopter (which I had never flown) and was designed to teach helicopter exchange pilots about the rules and regs of flying in UK airspace. Canada is an enormous country geographically, and much of our airspace is unclassified, meaning 'see and be seen', monitor standard frequencies for traffic information and use the myriad of small, largely unmanned airstrips and landing zones (LZs) that litter our country. In stark contrast, the UK is quite densely populated with an amazing low level flying system, the likes of which I had never seen! Not only was the low flying system completely unfamiliar, so were all the landmarks, radio procedures and much of the terminology, checklists, and maps. Suffice to say it was a steep learning curve. The concurrent cultural immersion was also fraught with confusion: what the heck was a batty and why were they going to 'knock me up' in the morning, who was this 'Tannoy' I was supposed to listen to, and why I should not talk about pants? A friend once remarked that Canada and the UK were similar countries, divided by a common language. Suffice to say, I could regale you for hours with my linguistic faux pas in the early days of my exchange, but I very quickly learned not to discuss pants and suspenders!!

Following the UKOC, I headed to RAF Odiham, and to 27(R) Squadron to begin my Operational Conversion Course (OCU) on the Puma helicopter. A few things to note about Pumas: they're rather large, the rotors turn in the opposite direction to Twin Hueys, and their gear is retractable. I could, again, delight you with loads of stories of using the wrong pedal in flight (helicopter aircrew will understand the significance of that!) and of either flying around with the gear down the entire flight because I forgot to retract it or, worse, attempting to land with it retracted.

One of the first things I noticed flying in the UK was that Europe was close by and there were several countries I could get to in less than a day! When you are Canadian, that is a real treat. In North America, there are not very many countries that you can fly to in a helicopter, unless you plan to take days to get there with countless refuelling stops. On the OCU overseas



Sennybridge 1994: Susan with a 27 Sqn Puma.

trainer, we travelled to (and got weathered in all over) France and Germany; I enjoyed every minute! In December 1994, thanks to the tremendous patience of my instructor, Flight Lieutenant Jack Robson, and support from the other aircrew on my OCU, I completed the course successfully and headed off to join 33 Sqn in January 1995.



Just 6 weeks into my time on 33 Squadron as a Limited Combat Ready (LCR) Puma pilot, we were tasked to deploy to the Netherlands to assist with flood relief. The heavy rain that hit France (in the area of Charleville) and Germany at the end of January 1995 enlarged the Mass (Meuse), Waal and Rhine rivers, threatening to overwhelm the Netherlands' flood protection walls and inundate the heart of the country. Two Pumas were tasked to provide airlift capability and reconnaissance support to the government authorities of these countries. Based out of Laarbruch, our deployment turned out to be only a few days long, but our Squadron commanding officer (CO), then Wing Commander Utley, was so pleased with our work that he 'awarded' us all special medals for our efforts!

OP GRAPPLE Croatia 1995

Spring 1995 passed quickly, with me flying numerous Night Vision Goggle (NVG) trips in the Stafford Training area, as well as participating in the VE day flypast on 21 April. On 27 April, 1995, I became the first (and only) female Puma pilot in the world to be granted Full Combat Ready or CR status, just in time to deploy to Bosnia.

In 1995, Bosnia and the deteriorating situation within its borders was front page news around the world. For months, starting in May, there were rumblings of the creation of a joint Army Air Corps/RAF deployment to Croatia in support of the UK Rapid Reaction Force comprising Infantry and Combat Engineers, so as to assist the international stabilisation efforts.

The deployment was announced in June 1995, and pre-deployment training on weapons and aircraft systems began in earnest at that point. The Pumas deploying to Croatia were fitted with a new IR jammer and Radar Warning Receiver only days before we left so there was much studying and flying required. Much to my delight, I was tasked with being one of 8 aircraft captains to be deployed, and we all gathered in the briefing room to review the Brit Intelligence reports on the situation.

"All right you lot, settle down" the Squadron Intelligence Officer (Int O) chastised. "Everyone settle in for a brief of the situation inside Bosnia and Croatia; however, Captain Weicker you'll need to step out of the room".

It turned out that the intelligence information regarding the deployment had been classified 'UK Eyes Only' and that clearly did not include me. Thankfully, the Squadron CO would eventually receive special dispensation for me to read the Intelligence reports with the caveat that I would be under his direct supervision when I did so. I spent several fun-filled hours sitting in his office pouring through files and getting up to speed on known threats, countermeasures and enemy force locations. It was the



January 1995 - the special 'Flood Relief' medal.

first of many unusual situations I would find myself in as an Exchange pilot!

Six Puma helicopters and eight full crews were slated to deploy to Ploče, Croatia. For those not familiar with this part of the world, Croatia borders Bosnia on the West and the Adriatic Sea on the East. The major cities of Split and Dubrovnik are on the Adriatic with Ploče located between the two. Although I had deployed previously to Somalia as a Huey pilot, I will admit that I was very anxious as this was the first time I would deploy to a theatre of war as the pilot-in-command of an aircraft.

Ploče Dockyard Camp (PDC) in Croatia (see map below) had been designated as our base of operations for the duration of deployment, and on 8 August we departed RAF Odiham for the 2 days transit to Ploče, via Nice, France. We arrived in theatre late on 9 August, via Ancona/ Falconara Italy, which was being used by NATO fighter forces as their forward staging area.





August 1995 - 33 Squadron's Operation GRAPPLE aircrew contingent:
Standing (L-R) Harry Palmer, Paul Bolton, Martin Cowie, Charlie Chan-a-Sue (RN), Pete Edwards, John Carrigan, Ian Wright, Michelle Fanneran, Rick Cooke, Sara Slingsby, Martin Bird (AAC), Dave Smithers.
Kneeling (L-R) Jase Appleton, Steve Hamilton, Susan Weicker (RCAF), Steve Molsom, John Eversfield, Andy Carrodus.



Aerial photograph of Ploče Dockyard Camp (PDC).

The following is an excerpt from my personal deployment journal:

9 August 95

Day 1 in theatre saw briefings and more briefings – airspace coordination, military information, customs procedures, camp admin etc. Lunch and dinner were phenomenal. The cooks here are doing an amazing job – 4 or 5 main course choices + dessert. The other facilities are really good also – toilets with seats, running water etc. Almost like home... almost!

Day 2 followed pretty much like Day 1 with more briefings. It hardly seemed like Friday night though. On Saturday, I went to the Ops tent to read the Flying Order Book and SOP 204 on UN Helo Ops. A few words on Ploče – I'm thoroughly impressed with the work the Royal Engineers have done on this place. They're still working on a few things (flight line, tent lines) but the amount of effort is astounding. The weather since we arrived has been spectacular. 25 degrees C each day – not a cloud in the sky. The wind picks up each day to about 15-25 knots which blows dirt and sand about, but it keeps things a little cooler. It's a westerly wind called The Maestral. As far as the eye can see there is sea and mountains. Gorgeous. No wonder this was once such a popular vacation spot.

Received my first mail yesterday which was rather funny because it was a credit card bill. Oh well - hopefully some personal mail will show up eventually!

Off for a run (I hope my knees will hold out!)

We spent several days setting up our tents, command posts, maintenance area, and operations centre. All aircrew flew familiarization flights up and down the coast between Split and Dubrovnik and had a chance to practice dissimilar formation with the Chinooks that had deployed from 7 Squadron, also based in Odiham.

My logbook is filled with the names of Croatian and Bosnian towns and airports - Zadar, Znojmo, Divulje Barracks, Split, Mostar, Gornji Vakuf, Tuzla – into which we flew, picking up troops, conducting reconnaissance (recce) and completing resupply runs. Always in the back of our minds was the threat of surface to air missiles (SAMS) and small arms fire as we flew over

unknown, potentially hostile territory. My crew and I had spent long hours talking about our Escape and Evasion (E & E) plans should we have the misfortune to either crash or be shot down. Scott O'Grady, the US Air Force F15 pilot, had just survived his week in enemy territory, so our discussions were both timely and important. I had never given a great deal of thought to being either shot down or captured and I will readily admit that the thought filled me with dread.

However, my crew looked to me to provide guidance and so we developed a plan that divvied up the myriad of tasks we would face, including the destruction of cryptographic material, removal of weapons from the helicopter, the choice of a safe location to regroup, and the command of any passengers we might be carrying at the time.

As the pilot and aircraft commander, I knew that my most important task was flying the aircraft safely to the ground. However, my responsibilities extended far beyond that; it also meant ensuring the safety of my crew and passengers until we were either rescued or made it to friendly territory.

What was my plan and how was I going to ensure our survival and move us towards help? It was a lot to think about and I relied on my crew a great deal. My navigator was always on the map and the GPS, so we would know exactly where we were and what landmarks and safe havens were close by. Our safe location – nicknamed Hollywood – was pre-programmed into the GPS units in our survival vests and would provide the direction in which to head once we'd regrouped. It was also comforting to know that we weren't alone flying over hostile territory. AWACS had been deployed into theatre and was providing 24/7 overwatch of the entire theatre area. We also had HF comms with the Air Base in Croatia. The third member of our crew, our crewman, was responsible for securing the aircraft and its passengers, many of whom were soldiers. Part of the pre-mission brief was to ensure they understood their role in providing protection of the aircraft and helping to secure a safe route to our extraction point should we need it. We did have a few exciting moments over the course of the deployment but thankfully, we never had to implement our E & E plans. I was however very proud of my crew



Susan flying over Croatia 9 August 1995

for the way we tackled the planning for a very difficult and complicated situation.

After we settled into PDC, I took the opportunity to create a handwritten newsletter entitled 'Pumas in Ploče' which was sent to Odiham as a means of

keeping our families and friends at home up to date on the goings-on in Croatia. Overleaf is a transcript of the first edition:



PUMAS IN PLOČE

15 August 1995

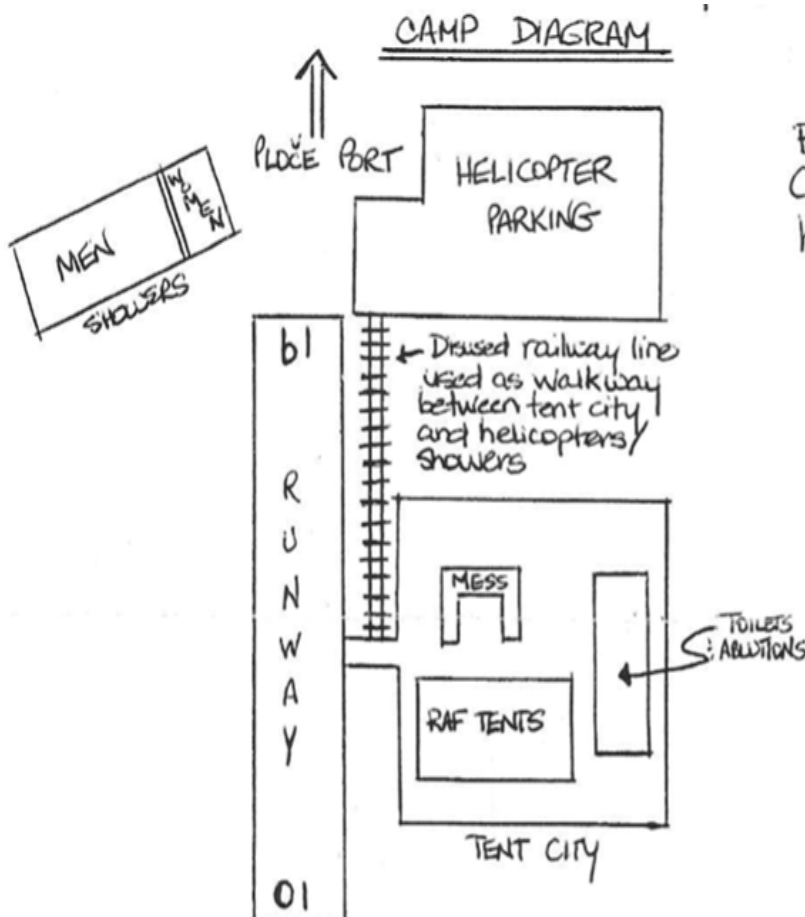
Welcome to Edition #1 of PUMAS IN PLOČE, a weekly newsletter that we can use to pass along interesting bits of information about life in PLOČE.

PLOČE: Ploče is a port town located midway between Split and Dubrovnik on the Adriatic coast of Croatia. Sheltered by the surrounding hills, Ploče's temperature has been 25-30 degrees C every day since we arrived. We are located on the airfield south of the town of Ploče itself. At last count, there are over 1500 personnel living on the airfield.

FACILITIES ON CAMP: Our 'home away from home' is quite well equipped to make our lives here in the field as comfy as possible.

*Mail: Most important for all of us is mail from home. The mail arrives here each evening and is collected each morning. A quick survey indicates that mail arrives here from the UK about 4 days after it is posted.

*Meals/Physical Training (PT): I've grouped these two together for a reason. The food here has been so good that unless we do some PT each day, we'll all get back to the UK weighing two stone more than when we left! Running is the most popular 'waistline watcher' however the PT instructor on camp runs circuit training three times a day as well as providing various bits of sports equipment for us to use (badminton racquets etc.). The warm temperature means most PT is done late afternoon or early evening.



Besides the RAF, the Army Air Corps (AAC) and the French have troops living on the airfield.

The AAC are flying Lynx and Gazelles. The French are flying PUMAS and of course, the 7 SQN Chinooks are here as well!

*Showers: A huge shower complex has been constructed at the North end of the camp, divided for both men and women to use. Heated water is available on a limited basis, otherwise COLD showers are the norm! Showers consist of a pipe with holes drilled in it at five foot intervals. It gets rather sporting when the wind picks up and you have to 'chase' the water.

*Laundry: Lots of us handwash our clothes; however, there is a laundry service available. We drop our laundry bags off in the morning and VOILA 4 hours later it's back (reasonably clean although somewhat damp!). The clothes are laundered on camp by the Mobile Laundry and Bath unit or MLBU which is co-located with the showers. (They also provide the hot water for our showers so they are quite popular!)

*Toilets/Ablutions: Our hats are off to the Royal Engineers for sorting this area for us! The toilets, although rudimentary, work very well. They comprise a number of plywood/tin sheds which house a rubber barrel (complete with toilet seat!) which empties into a cavern below. The ablutions area has cold running water and is used by the camp's populace for basic bathing, shaving, brushing teeth, washing hair and doing laundry.

*NAAFI (Navy, Army, Air Force Institute) Shop: A small shop beside the mess tent opens three times a day to sell refreshments and snacks as well as basic toiletries and film. The currency of choice here is Deutsch marks.

*Other Facilities: Lest you think we are scraping by in our spartan existence....

-our satellite TV and VCR came on line a few days ago so the BBC World News and other interesting programs are available for aircrew and ground crew!

-Archie (our intrepid and remarkably well connected purveyor of virtually anything you ask for) provides us with drinks, snacks, t-shirts etc. (for a small fee of course!)

-our living quarters have most of the comforts of home including electricity, tables (although mostly of a cardboard variety) and floor coverings (again of the cardboard variety!)

DAILY ROUTINE: Our daily routine starts with breakfast (or early morning PT for those of us keen enough to get up at 0630!). 'Morning prayers' as they're known are at 0900 – essentially the morning brief for aircrew and flight commanders to pass along 'need to know' info about operations and camp administration. The daily activities vary according to the flying program – those not flying work on maps and other flight planning tasks. Lunch is 1130-1300 and afternoon routine is much the same as the morning. Most people do PT between 1700 and 1800 followed by a shower then dinner until 1930. The mail arrives after dinner and evenings are mostly our own: letter writing, reading, playing cards and watching TV are favourite pastimes. Lights out at 2300!

FLYING OPERATIONS: Operational tasking for the PUMAS in theatre hasn't been overwhelming. Aside from a VIP trip between Ploče and Split, flying has been restricted to local area familiarization and training. For the fliers amongst you, the local area has been divided into two VFR training areas and one IFR area. Each crew has been up for a famil and basic handling trip. We're looking forward to doing some day mixed formation with the Chinooks and some night nav around the local islands.

PLEASE SEND US...! This will be a regular feature (I hope) of the PUMAS IN PLOČE. Most people will have requested specific items in their letters home – this section will cover items of a more general nature:

1. Newspapers – even if they're a few days old, we enjoy getting the written word from home (besides we like horoscopes and cartoons!)
2. Any magazines (of good taste) are welcome. (We women would love any VOGUE or COSMO you've got lying around!)
3. Videotaped news segments, movies or specialty programs would also be appreciated.

A FINAL WORD (OR TWO!)

There are no phones currently available on camp so letters and this newsletter are currently the only means of communication. Through PUMAS IN PLOČE we'll try to keep you up to date on life in Croatia. We are all enjoying the challenges we face here in Croatia but those of you at home are never far from our thoughts.

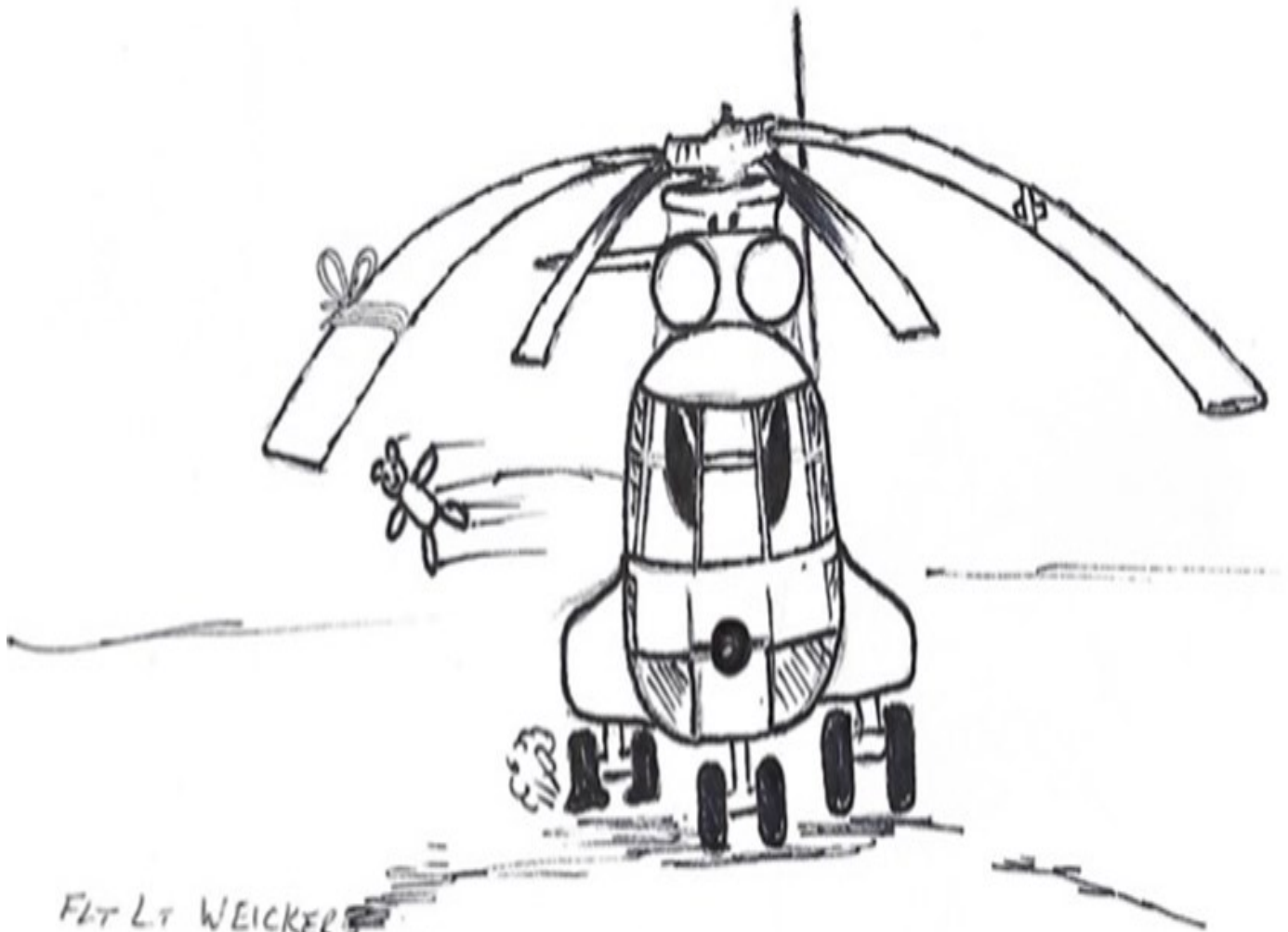


SWICKER
CAPT.

Personal Deployment Journal:

21 August 95

Lots and lots of news since last entry. I tried early last week to get some dissimilar formation done with the Chinooks. I went through 3 aircraft trying to find one that was actually serviceable. It was just incredible. The engineers drew me the cartoon below to commemorate the occasion!



FLT LT WEICKER
SUE'S CHECK LIST
GYRO - KNACKERED!
BATTERIES - FLAT!
BRAKES - WORN!
THROTTLES FORWARD --OOPS!
TEDDY - OH ****ING HELL!

Night flying didn't go either because of aircraft unserviceability. We had 3 days of incredible CB (cumulonimbus) weather. The storms hit at night and the light shows were absolutely amazing. The tent was dry although the second night my window blew open so I ended up with a wet sleeping bag. I haven't heard rain like that for ages. I tried a trip to Zagreb on Friday afternoon but the weather was terrible inland and we weren't able to cross over the mountains. We ended up having to turn around and come back to Ploče. The Friday night happy hour was in full swing when we returned so we got some 'beers' in.

Saturday was a half day off for most. I unfortunately was on duty for the day. The morning was quiet but it got very busy in the afternoon. There was night flying as well so I came in at night too. Was put on as authorizer as well.

Sunday morning was an early rise at 0550 hours for a 0715 launch to Divulje Barracks (Split). When I got into Ops I found out I had a stretcher case as well. Got back from Divulje at 0845. Got tagged with doing a ground run and it was during the ground run that I heard about the Lynx crash. The helicopter crashed at 1000 hours, 5 miles south of the base. There were 5 onboard – 2 crew and 3 pax. One of the passengers survived. The aircraft sunk in 80' of water. Puma crews (not me though) ferried divers and equipment out to the crash site all afternoon and early evening.

CNN reported the following on the crash:

"... a rapid reaction force helicopter crashed into the Adriatic while on a training flight near Ploce, Croatia. U.N. rescue teams have confirmed that four of five crew members are dead. The fifth was picked up by a fishing boat and treated for minor injuries. The helicopter, a British Lynx, may have gone down in bad weather, although officials are still uncertain what caused the crash."



Remnants of the mess tent complex after the first Adriatic storm.

THEN THE RAINS CAME

As noted, fall on the Dalmatian Coast brings sudden and very strong storms to Croatia, however none of us were prepared for the destruction the first storm wrought on our Camp. Forty knot winds (70 km/hour) had maintenance personnel scurrying to tie down helicopters while the rest of us tried desperately to keep our modular tents from departing the Camp. Several engineers were injured when they were struck by the long metal poles from the tents and, when the storm was over, the true extent of the damage became apparent.

The winds had destroyed our mess tent complex, and the accompanying deluge had laid 'waste' (pardon the pun) to latrine facilities. Without going into too much detail, the incredible amount of rainfall had pushed the large plastic tanks of sewage to the surface, causing several to spew a toxic sludge that flowed throughout the camp's living quarters. In places, there was three feet of water which prompted a rather adventurous soldier to go snorkeling. Given the previously described 'toxic sludge', I elected to don full Gortex rain gear and rubber boots until the 'water' subsided.

Personal Deployment Journal:

Saturday 26 August 95

Back in Ploče after 2 days in Italy. Part of me wanted to come back – part of me didn't. We're all drying out after the most amazing rainstorm. It hit us in Ancona and it buried Ploče under 9" of water in places. Looks like a war zone. To backtrack...

Left for Ancona/Falconara via Split on Thursday at 0830 hours. Had to go to customs at Split airport enroute (they want the landing fees) then off we went. Weather was gorgeous and we arrived in Ancona mid-morning. Off to Vicenza – got there at 1300 hours. Off we went to Venice by train – what a gorgeous city.

Arrived at Venezia San Lucia train station then took the water bus to San Marco. Had a bit of a wander/pizza then went for a gondola ride then dinner. The gondolier was hilarious – he kept shouting ‘Garogne’ at everyone! Had spaghetti carbonara and wrote post cards then took the water bus back to the train.

Up early Friday morning for the PX – bought jeans and a sweatshirt as well as some magazines and writing paper. Launched at 1500 hours only to encounter thundershower / storm at Ancona. There was no way we could get to Ploče – they were 200 metres vis in rain so we stayed in Falconara / Senigallia. There was also a Herc crew there because they had seen a snake on board the aircraft. They gassed it this morning as they were leaving. Early to bed – tired!!

Up for 1000 hours launch this a.m. – had a secondary task to pick up the new OC/Group Captain at Split. Arrived back at Ploče to see the rain damage. Everyone worked really hard to get pallets out – most of my kit is dry (except my knickers!). The toilets didn’t fare so well – two sets of them have heaved out of the ground. There’s a pool in front of the mess tent and a new 3 foot trench along all the tents. Must have been horrendous!

Over the following weeks, we rebuilt the mess complex, repaired the latrine area, and fortified the flight line in anticipation of other Adriatic storms; however, after the camp was once again obliterated by a second, more powerful storm, the RAF conducted a tactical retreat to an empty hotel up the coast and remained there for the rest of the deployment, traveling by car or van to Ploče when we were tasked with a mission.

Personal Deployment Journal:

05 Sept 95

It’s been a busy few days. Last Friday – 3 Aug – was the Army Air Corps dinner. What a good time. 3 days prior

to that the NATO air strikes had started so we were on standby for short notice tasks and carrying our flak vests and helmets around with us. It meant we couldn’t drink our faces off at the dinner but we still had a good time.

We started our first trips into Bosnia Herzegovina (BH) on Saturday. After hours of delay we went on a bit of a recce – Mostar, Kiseljak, Gorni Vakuf, the Bulk Fuel Installation (BFI). The devastation in some of the villages was amazing. The Mostar valley is our bad weather transit route. It’s quite a steep sided valley with strings of wires on each side. I got locked by I-band radar and we deployed flares with the Missile Approach Warning System (MAWS). We were loaded for bear – pistol, GMPG [general purpose machine gun], E & E kit etc. It was nice to get back to the camp! Sunday was my day off – the weather wasn’t great in the morning so I worked out. It cleared in the afternoon so we went to the beach. Had schnitzel and chips and ice cream – pricey really at 30 Deutsch marks.

Monday was a really busy day. Up at 0540 hours to lead a 2-plane through the mountains in BH to Kiseljak and on to Tuzla. Got just south of Kiseljak when we ran into bad weather and had to turn back. Saw several lightning strikes by the BFI and ended up doing a bit of a ‘grovel’ through mountain passes. Very challenging. Took the Mostar Valley back to Ploče. Was searched by several radars and banged out flares when the MAWS went off. That really got my attention! Delayed the trip until 1330 hours and tried again. The weather was much better. We refuelled at the BFI then on to Kiseljak no problems and refuelled there. We headed off to Tuzla but as we were lifting the weather window closed so we went to Tuzla Blue Factory. We stayed for dinner then headed back to Ploče when the weather cleared.

I was able to write one more edition of Pumas in Ploče before I returned to the UK in late September. Here is a transcript of Edition 2, dated 9 September 1995:



PUMAS IN PLOČE

ANCHORS AWEIGH !!

PUMAS IN PLOČE (issue number 2) comes to you from a sodden, rather “worse for wear” camp. We have endured yet another Adriatic thunderstorm. By all accounts the RAF tent lines did not fare too badly. We lost two tents in the wind and rain.... several people sustained minor injuries as they tried to prevent their tents from departing. We all enjoyed an open air breakfast this morning....the mess tent collapsed during the night so the catering staff fed us outside. It was almost like being on a picnic...NOT! Other areas of the camp were hit much harder. The Kirby Lines housing the Royal Engineers were absolutely decimated!! Several of the PUMAS also sustained damage to their rotor heads and blades because of the high winds. Apparently this is only the start of rainy season!!

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING ?!

It's been a busy three weeks since the last issue and we at PDC (Ploče Death Camp) have been quite busy. After the first rainstorm hit, we spent several days shoring up our tents and filling sandbags. The Royal Engineers have been busy building a new road at camp so the main vehicle transit route from the camp to the flying site is no longer the runway. The loos that toppled / collapsed in the last storm have been repaired and / or replaced (much to our delight) and the shower roof has been repaired so that the entire shower area is now enclosed.

We in the SH force have been busy building pallet cities inside our tent lines. As you no doubt heard after the first rainstorm, most of Camp Papa was under water, so a frantic search began for pallets to put beds and kit onto to keep it dry. Rover after Rover of pallets arrived at the camp and people got very inventive in building sitting areas and raised bed platforms in their tents. Unfortunately, some of the pallets we 'nicked' belonged to the Croatians so we've been restricted to three pallets per person. They worked a charm during last night's storm.

FLYING...FLYING...FLYING

When we first arrived in theatre, we were restricted to operating within Croatia only. The runs up to Split and Zagreb became a daily occurrence. On 1 Sept we received clearance to start flying into Bosnia Herzegovina (BH) and both Pumas and Chinooks have been 'in country' daily since then. Virtually every day, we fly into Kiseljak, Gorni Vakuf or Tuzla taking in passengers, freight or both. The countryside is breathtakingly beautiful...8000' mountains with waterfalls, alpine meadows and plateaus and tiny villages. Against this backdrop, whole villages stand deserted and in ruins. Some people have made their way back and are starting to rebuild their homes but the waste and ruin are heartbreaking.

None of the aircraft flying into BH have experienced any hostilities whatsoever. Although we know the weapons systems are out there, they have pretty much left us alone. The NATO air strikes around Sarajevo have obviously had an impact.

The weather in BH is much the same as it is on the coast however the mountain terrain inland means often there are valleys that are completely blocked by cloud. All the navigators here have become adept at finding low level routes around the country! It's not unusual to have one valley in bright sunshine only to find the next valley along is covered in cloud. Two aircraft ended up spending the night away with an engineering detachment thanks to weather but they returned safe and sound the next day!

R&R/MORALE !

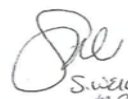
There's nothing like a day away from Ploče to improve morale and most of us have made the 25 minute trek up the coast to the local beach for the day. It's amazing what a restaurant meal and a swim in the Adriatic can do for morale. The Chinook flight has started their R&R program already...the Puma crews start theirs on 10 Sept. The R&R bus leaves at 1600 and returns personnel to Ploče two days later. Although the hotel was somewhat over-booked for the first group of Chinook pers that went, a good time was had by all and the rest of us are looking forward to our time away. Entire crews are scheduled away on R&R not just individuals so usually three Puma pers are away and four from the Chinooks.

Morale got a big boost this past Monday (4 Sept) when the Combined Services Entertainment (CSE) show arrived on camp. I got a good giggle out of the dancing girls and 'magician' that opened the show but the real hit was the band 'The Searchers'. From the first song, they had all of us standing on our chairs/benches singing and clapping along with their hits. Some of us are even old enough to remember all the words to all the songs!! It was an excellent evening out and a pleasant change to the normal night routine we've settled into.

PLEASE SEND US...

In the never ending search to remain part of the civilized world, we would appreciate any newspapers and magazines you may have lying around. Also, the videos that have been arriving are much appreciated. Treats and sweets are shared around the tents and are great for morale. Thanks for all the letters and cards that are arriving. It's the most looked forward to part of the day!

Not much other news ... hope all is well back in Odiham. We think of you often and wish (you have no idea how much!) that we were there.


S. WEICKERT
CAPT
9 SEPT 95

Other memorable moments from OP GRAPPLE.....

AWACS

I had previously mentioned that AWACS provided 24/7 top cover for all aircraft operating in theatre. Their callsign was MAGIC and it was my first experience working with airborne warning and control aircraft. On departure from PDC, we would check in with MAGIC, advise them of our destination and time enroute, and then monitor the frequency in case they had updates for us. In a strange twist, I found out eight years later when I married my husband (an air weapons controller who served on AWACS in Bosnia), that I had most likely spoken with him while on a mission. There were only three female pilots in theatre – myself, RAF Flight Lieutenant Sara Slingsby (now Mackmin), and a female F16 pilot from Sweden. Apparently, the AWACS crew enjoyed hearing the female voices on the radio and, as the only Canadian, mine was quite recognizable!

Missile Lock

The six Pumas that deployed on OP GRAPPLE were fitted with a new infrared (IR) jammers and Radar Warning Receivers (RWR) only days before we deployed, so our crew took every opportunity to work with this new kit when we flew.

On 7 September, we were returning from a basic handling trip off the coast when our RWR lit up, indicating we were being targeted by a radar guided missile. There were several weapons systems in theatre that posed a significant threat to helicopters, so we immediately initiated countermeasures: turned towards the threat, assessed the strength of the RWR signal to determine proximity of the missile system, and then executed a rapid descent behind the high ground of an offshore island in an effort to break the lock. Hearts pounding, we remained masked behind the high ground until MAGIC cleared us to return to base. Turns out, a foreign fighter jet wanted to practice searching for and locking onto moving targets and we just happened to be the target of choice. I would have loved to have been in on the AWACS debrief with that pilot!

Coastal Search & Rescue

PDC was home not only to the RAF detachment of Pumas and Chinooks, but also the Army Air Corps (AAC) Lynx and Gazelle contingent. We shared the flight line, but the crews and support personnel were bivouacked elsewhere in the Camp. Sadly, early in the deployment, we had a Lynx ditch in the Adriatic after a mechanical failure and several crew members died. After this unfortunate event, the RAF instituted a continuous Search and Rescue (SAR) posture in the event of any further mishaps.

On 22 September, PUMA Ops was notified that a military member who had been kayaking in the Adriatic as part of their R & R day had not returned to shore and was thought to be in distress at sea. Flight Lieutenant 'Harry' Palmer and I were in Ops when the call came in. There were no crewman available to launch so Harry, who had been a Puma crewman before reclassifying to Navigator, bravely volunteered to resume his crewman duties so he and I could launch immediately to commence the search. Off we went – me flying solo for the first time as aircraft captain and Harry in the back as crewman – only to find out after 45 minutes in the air that the missing kayaker had returned to shore unharmed. Harry and I had a ball flying back to base; me enjoying having the cockpit to myself and Harry reliving his days as a Puma crewman!

End OP

After almost 65 hours in theatre flying day and night missions, the deployment ended for me on 25 September when I flew back to RAF Odiham. The remainder of the Squadron fully re-deployed by early October, marking the end of OP GRAPPLE.

Fighter Affil

November 1995 was filled with interesting and exciting flying at 33 Squadron, starting with my first ever fighter affiliation (fighter affil) tasking. Doctrinally, fighters and helicopters are employed very differently; fighters are ordinarily a strategic resource used in either air-ground or air-air roles whereas helicopters are often under tactical command and control of ground forces for airlift, resupply, casualty evacuation and Command & Control (C2) roles. Fighter affil explored the option for fighters to engage helicopters as targets of opportunity as part of a larger mission, i.e., interception during return to base (RTB) after an air-ground mission.

The doctrine and tactics of such an engagement are worthy of another complete article, and indeed I wrote a paper on these tactics when I returned to Canada in 1998, so I will only briefly describe the mission.

In a tactical environment, helos are either below 150' Above Ground Level (AGL) or above 800'AGL to avoid ground-based small arms fire. When there are hostile air assets in the area, we opt for the former, but flying that close to the ground at a slow airspeed of 80-90 knots (125 km/hr) makes us extremely hard for fighters to find. Their Doppler radars cannot easily distinguish us from ground clutter and, when seen from above, our dark paint colour blends well with ground cover. The exception is rotor glint – the sun reflecting off the large, rapidly spinning rotor disc and when trying to avoid 'enemy' fighters, it is imperative to minimize rotor glint as much as possible.

From the fighter perspective, helos are small fish;

finding and intercepting us is work intensive, involves complex flight parameters, and yields little gain unless we are part of a multi-ship airmobile or working as a C2 platform. To expedite training (and ensure the fighters could find and intercept us), we flew with our landing lights on, provided bearing info and 'squawked' on our IFF frequencies. Once 'spotted', we would turn towards the fighter in an effort to minimize our signature and give them the opportunity to try to 'paint us' with radar or (notionally) fire an IR missile at us. After a couple successful intercepts, we would do at least one run with our landing lights off, no IFF squawk and using terrain masking techniques to minimize our profile so the fighters got a sense of how difficult we were to spot. The only platform to ever successfully 'find' us in this configuration were the Harriers, which was not surprising, given their ability to 'hover' and essentially sneak up on us!

I had the opportunity to conduct dozens of fighter affil runs during my exchange and all of them broadened the scope of the tactics helos could employ to escape detection. One of my responsibilities as an exchange pilot was to observe and help develop new tactics that could be used by CF tactical helicopters and fighter affil had never been part of the CF Air Doctrine. To my knowledge, that remains the case; CF fighter resources remain scarce and, therefore, are not able to include helo interception as part of their mission

capability.

Mountain Flying in the Alps

As noted at the beginning of this article, mountain flying was an integral part of my early flying at 408 Squadron in Edmonton Alberta. In November 1993, I completed the CF Mountain Flying course run by Canadian Helicopters in Penticton, British Columbia using the Bell 206 Jet Ranger. This 26-hour course comprised lesson plans on flying in cirques, conducting approaches to pinnacles, and landing on glaciers. My final flight test was an approach and landing on the Kokanee Glacier (made famous by Kokanee Beer).

Imagine my delight in November when I had the opportunity to pilot a Puma near Fürstfeldbruck in the Bavarian Alps! Over the course of three days, our crew conducted approaches to crags and tors, practiced various emergencies including engine failure on approach, and generally familiarised ourselves with the operating limitations of the Puma at high altitude. Unlike fighter affil, which was a learning experience for me, mountain flying provided an opportunity for me to instruct my RAF counterparts on the fine art of helo ops in mountainous terrain. My Bavarian excursion marked the end of my first full year as an operational Puma pilot and I was hopeful that 1996 would bring more new and interesting challenges!



Susan on the Kokanee Glacier, BC



Notes from the Nineties is part of a book entitled **Up Front** that Major (retired) Susan Forgues is writing, describing her 16 years as a Canadian Forces tactical helicopter pilot. Susan retired from the CF in 2004 after suffering a neck injury while flying. She went on to complete a second undergrad degree (Anthropology with a minor in Linguistics) and, in 2014, successfully defended her thesis on Aptitude Testing for Military Pilot Candidates and received a Master of Education in Cognitive Studies from Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. She is currently an award winning RE/MAX Realtor® in Ottawa Canada where she resides with her husband Major -General (retired) Pierre Forgues, their two cats Phil & Tiger, and their dog Sam.



Farewell to Mike Evans, 'Arctic Warrior' and a 33 Squadron Legend!

by Des Goff, Ian McLuskie's personal navigator!

For many a year in the 1980-90s, initially as a 33 Squadron navigator but later in other non-Squadron posts, Mike Evans ran the Arctic Survival training at Bømoen Camp near Voss in Norway, in support of the Squadron's AMF Flight. The Norway detachment sometimes ran for up to two months and everybody, regardless of rank and role, was required to pass a short(ish) arctic survival course; some lasted longer than others – read on!

Aircrew were not allowed to fly until they had done the course or a short refresher. The training consisted of a couple of days ground lectures followed by 3 days / nights 'in the snow', either at Bømoen itself in the extensive woodland there or up in the hills at the so-called 'Army Air Corps Hut', Mike's favourite location for the snowhole night. The other nights were spent either in tents or snow graves, and occasionally in igloos! In addition, there was a limited amount of cross-country skiing training on the 'NATO planks', as the Norwegian skis were affectionately known.

Mike had qualified as an Arctic Warfare Instructor courtesy of a course with the Paras, the AMF Infantry battalion of the time, and over the course of a few years was assisted by other Squadron personnel such as Stevie Cummings and John Essery. However, it was by no means the lightest of secondary duties and involved a great deal of planning as well as some big shoulders to rest easy with the responsibility of keeping everybody safe in arctic conditions, with temperatures frequently close to or below -30°C!

The so called 'arctic' equipment of the time looked remarkably similar to that used on Captain Robert Falcon Scott's last expedition to the Antarctic. Initially the skis were wooden and attached to the boots with a combination of metal and leather straps, although later on some metal edged skis became available. The clothing was 'interesting' to say the least...open neck blue aircrew shirts, cravats and string vests I remember along with what I think were officially entitled 'Gloves Cold/Wet', very aptly named because they weren't warm at the best of times and even worse when wet! But it wasn't all bad, oh no ...the arctic socks were brilliant and the arctic sleeping bags were good if very bulky. Not content with just teaching Mike set about updating the kit as well and with the help of some funding and trials successfully upgraded a lot of the kit. The old heavy primus stoves were replaced, new



Mike in typical 'Arctic Warrior' mode!

Crusader Rucsacs appeared in Stores, Norgie shirts became 'issue' as opposed to a personal purchase and the old, so-called waterproofs were replaced by Gore-Tex clothing and better gloves.

I did my first course with Mike in January 1983, and all went well until the night of the snowhole up in the hills where we'd been delivered by Puma. I remember that we skied for a while and then set about digging the night's accommodation, rarely an easy task, a lot of digging and a lot of sweating even in the cold. Eventually, however, we - I had two groundcrew with me - settled in for the night. I remember waking and thinking I'd slept well, not too surprising after the skiing and the digging, but I sensed pretty quickly that the snow was a bit closer to me than it had been at 'lights out'. Then I tried to roll over but couldn't because there was a weight on my legs stopping me from moving. Somehow in the end I moved and realised that the roof of the snow hole had all but collapsed and it might not be too good an idea to stay in it. I was on a ledge above the other two but eventually we all got out into the daylight to see that there had been a very heavy fall of snow in the night and that we weren't the only group in



Bømøen Base was established by the Norwegian Army in 1899, close to the railway offering quick access to Eastern Norway. This was considered important at the time because the main threat of war at the time was with Sweden. The airport was established in 1935, when the Norwegian Army Air Service built a small airfield, aligned southwest–northeast. The Luftwaffe took over Bømøen after the German occupation of Norway on 9 April 1940. Work with expanding the airport commenced in May, and was conducted based on the need for defending Bergen. By 1941 work on the airport was stopped, as the Wehrmacht decided to instead build an airport closer to Bergen. By then Bømøen had received a 1,000-by-50-metre (3,280 by 160 ft) runway with sections in concrete and others in wood. This work involved moving the runway and giving it an east–west alignment. The airport proved to have poor landing conditions and was hardly used after the opening of Herdla. No airborne units were ever stationed at Bømøen.



trouble. It was still snowing heavily. We managed to recover our kit and in the hope that we would be lifted out once it stopped snowing, packed up and sat huddled in groups waiting for rescue by Puma back to Bømoen. Sadly, it didn't stop snowing and as the hut and snowhole area were in a bowl which liked cloud the aircraft could not reach us, so we had to get digging again and retreat to the snow hole.

We were lucky, ours was recoverable but others weren't and had to start again from scratch. This went on, believe it or not, for 5 more days and nights as it just did not stop snowing and slowly most of the snowholes collapsed and people moved into the two surviving, stronger snow holes. Eventually the snow stopped on Day 6 and we all returned to Bømoen camp to tell the tale(s).

As much as anything I remember that my hands and feet were permanently frozen with no feeling at all when outside when waiting, and praying, for a break in the weather. On Day One, and everyday thereafter outside, I sat counting from one to twenty and at the same time tried to move either my toes or fingers to get some feeling there, which I eventually did but it literally took all day by which time it was time to get 'inside' for the night again. Paradoxically it is warmer in a snowhole than outside in the open but you have to be careful to regulate the heat from cooking otherwise condensation drips from the roof, makes things wet and you just don't have the heat to dry anything. I think it's fair to say that we came closer to

a real-life survival situation than was foreseen, we had begun to share and ration what food we had left, but hey we all survived to tell the tale and be the better for it. Help was on hand if only the weather would clear but there were no mobile phones etc in those days, we relied on Army signallers and HF radio!

Cross-country skiing was never the most popular part of the training to say the least but in as much as I have personally pursued and enjoyed it for the last forty years, thankfully with more modern kit, I owe Mike a very personal vote of thanks as indeed do all those whose time in the Arctic was made a lot more comfortable and liveable than it would otherwise have been. Be in no doubt that the operational aspects of both the training and Exercise elements of the detachment, which did actually take place much further north in Norway, inside the Arctic Circle in either the Bodo or Bardufoss regions, would not have been so successful without Mike's outstanding efforts over a decade or so. Indeed, not only was he invited back to lead the training once he had been posted away from 33 but in the end it took the staff of the Combat Survival and Rescue Officers' (CSRO) School from RAF St. Mawgan to replace him.

Sadly, Mike later succumbed to a combination of serious illnesses but fought them bravely over nearly two decades until the end on 29 June this year. RIP now you 'Warrior'... you deserve it!

Des Goff



Several of 33's AMF Arctic veterans turned out to bid Mike farewell. From L to R - Back Row: Ian Rose, Dave Coombes, Mike Barter. Centre Row: Mike Calame, Euan Alexander, Andy Abbott. Front Row: Al MacGregor, Reg Brindley, Des Goff, John Essery, Ian McLuskie, Chris Perkins.



Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (Land) and the Joint Force Helicopter Unit

The AMF(L)

Active from 1960 to 2002, the AMF(L) was NATO's multinational immediate reaction land force, directly subordinate to SACEUR. Strategically a highly mobile, lightly armed unit with the strength of brigade, its mission was to demonstrate to a potential aggressor that an attack against one NATO partner would draw a response by the forces of all NATO nations. Of the 16 NATO nations of the time, the following 14 contributed troops to the AMF(L) pool:

Belgium (since formation of the force)

Denmark (since 1996)

Germany (since formation)

Greece (since 1996)

Great Britain (since formation)

Italy (since 1963)

Canada (since 1964)

Luxembourg (since 1969)

Netherlands (since 1989)

Norway (since 1995)

Portugal (since 1997) - LRRP

Spain (since 1992)

Turkey (since 1996)

United States (since formation)

The AMF(L) came about after NATO analysts realized that although Central Europe was well protected against aggression by a heavy multinational presence that had been stationed there since the end of the Second World War this was not the case on the northern and southern flanks, where the Warsaw pact could probably act faster than NATO was capable of reacting. There was also a move away from NATO's former doctrine of massive retaliation to a more realistic strategy of flexible response, which required scaleable crisis management.

9/11, the War on Terror and the end of AMF

On the morning of 11 September 2001, we all remember nineteen Al Qaeda terrorists hijacking four

planes in the United States. Two planes were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City, causing both towers to collapse. A third plane was crashed into the Pentagon, just outside Washington, DC. The fourth plane crashed in rural Pennsylvania after the crew and passengers attacked the terrorists on board, preventing it from hitting another target thought to be the White House.

The attacks claimed nearly 3,000 lives and impacted many more globally. On 20 September, US President George W Bush declared a 'War on Terror' and stated that defeating terrorism was now the world's fight. The US had experienced terrorist attacks previously, but none had been on the same scale or significance. 9/11 shook the world and shaped the generation to come.

An invasion of Afghanistan was launched barely one month later, on 7 October 2001. American, British and Afghan United Front (Northern Alliance) forces were deployed to destroy al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime that had harboured the terrorist group in Afghanistan.

The Taliban regime fell in November 2001. Following an international conference in December, a new transitional Afghan government was formed. A UN-mandated multinational force, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established to help secure Kabul and assist the new administration. ISAF was initially tasked with providing security in Kabul and after NATO took command in 2003, ISAF deployed more widely across Afghanistan. Troops became increasingly involved in intense combat operations against a Taliban insurgency until 2014.

The broader impact of 9/11 meant that the perceived threat of international terrorism dominated governments and their foreign policies. Two years after 9/11 a decision was made to invade Iraq. The Bush administration claimed that Iraq's ruler, Saddam Hussein, was developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that threatened the peace of the world. After the initial success of removing Saddam from power, the US-led coalition took responsibility for reconstruction of the country. Their role has since come under close scrutiny alongside their justifications for war.

NATO had to disband the ACE Mobile Force in 2002 after Britain had to withdraw its 1500-strong contingent to ensure that troops were available to join any US attack on Iraq in the war against terrorism.

Britain's contribution included key support troops, without which the 6 000-strong force could not operate. With no other NATO member prepared to contribute more soldiers, the alliance had no choice but to disband it. HQ AMF(L) was disbanded on 31 October 2002, and was replaced by the NATO Response Force.

The Joint Force Helicopter Unit (JFHU)

The JFHU consisted of four Pumas of 33 Squadron, then based at RAF Odiham, and 12 Bell UH-1Ds of the Light Army Aviation Transport Squadron 9 AMF (*Leichte Heeresfliegertransportstaffel 9 AMF*) which was based at Niederstetten in Germany. The German squadron held the responsibility from 1 October 1993 to 31 March 1998, at which point the role moved to the first squadron of the 30th Army Aviation Regiment (HFlgRgt30 (1./FlgAbt301). When deployed in an operational area the command posts of the two units combined to form HQ JFHU, under tactical command of COMAMF(L). Apart from the service element of the German squadron, which contained all necessary supply, maintenance and medical units, JFHU was supported by the RAF's Tactical Supply Wing and 244 Signal Squadron.

A third helicopter component was a trio of UH-1Hs provided by 5/158 Aviation Regiment of 12 (US) Brigade, as airmobile command posts for COMAMF(L). The US helicopters were directly subordinate to COM AMF(L) and not to HQ JFHU.

The most important in the range of missions conducted by JFHU was the deployment and air transport of artillery batteries, signals, medics and infantry units; but the job also included MEDEVAC missions, resupply, reconnaissance, march supervision and SAR missions. In

mountainous and forested terrain the helicopters were also used as advanced observers, cooperating with the Forward Observation Officers (FOO) of the Force Artillery.

Cooperation between JFHU and the multinational units requesting helicopter support required extraordinary capabilities of the aircrew, maintenance crews and ground personnel to ensure the operability of the helicopters, independent of surrounding infrastructure, at anything from -30 degrees in northern Norway to +45 degrees in eastern Turkey.

For AMF(L) deployments SOPs were established for units to request transport space from the Tactical Operation Centre (TOC). Units would bid for air support by sending in a HELQUEST to the Force Air Support Centre (FASC), which was manned by personnel from No. 1 Group at RAF Odiham and was responsible for coordinating all air missions by helicopter and jets. Approved requests were sent by FASC to the HQJFHU, which then allocated the Hueys or Pumas to meet the unit requests. Units were informed that their requests had been accepted by a HELTASK, which detailed the number and type of helicopters, pick up point and landing site, mission details, radio frequencies, units to be transported, tactical situation and timings for the task.

Some national contingents had their own helicopter assets. For example, the Italian 3rd Alpini Regiment used to bring their Bell 206 Jet Rangers, wonderfully new and shiny aircraft compared to Pumas, Hueys and Gazelles provided by the RAF, the German Army and the AAC, the latter lovingly referred to as Teeny Weeny Airways. Alcohol Made Friends? Oh yes, it most certainly did!



RAF, German, American and Italian crews together in front of the ubiquitous Huey on exercise somewhere between northern Norway and southern Turkey—the AMF AO. To the left is MAcr Clem Clements and a young Fg Off Dave Stubbs. Lying on the grass at the front is Wolf Bandermeier (sp?), CO of the German detachment.

Graham's Lowe-down on Crete 2023

in which he sets the scene for his long awaited AGM presentation

On 20 and 21 May 1941 the Battle of Crete commenced, and this particular part of 33 Squadron's history, along with 30 Squadron's, has been well documented throughout previous editions of 'Loyalty'.

21 May 2021 marked the date of the 80th anniversary of the battle in which many of our compatriots (both air and ground crews) both fought in, died and some escaped from.

I - and my wife - decided that this was a worthy cause to commemorate and therefore we booked a two-week Tui holiday, staying at the same hotel, the Hotel Panorama, that we stayed at in 2018, when we first attended the 30 Squadron & 33 Squadron Crete Memorial Service.

However, the dreaded Covid pandemic arrived and not only did it cause havoc to worldwide civilization, but also our holiday, which was cancelled, as was the Crete commemorations for this historical day.

We managed to get the holiday rescheduled for the following year - 2022 - at no extra cost; however, during the early Spring of 2022 we had a family health crisis that meant we could not travel on those dates. This was quite traumatic at the time and we hit the 'Panic Button' i.e. full cancellation with loss of all money. To their credit Tui advised us not to do that. Instead they transferred our holiday to 2023 at around the same time of year on a similar booking. They said that we could change it at our leisure, recommending around Christmas time if we were unhappy with the new arrangements. All we would have to do was contact them and the administration costs would be £100 each. By changing our holiday accommodation to a similar resort they saved us £400, which was reimbursed to us. In the end we decided to stay with their plan as their new arrangements appeared most comparable to what we originally wanted. There was just one small problem with the rearranged visit - we would not be there until the 23 May.

With the 30 Squadron & 33 Squadron Memorial stating the date of the action was the 20th and 21st May we thought that we would miss the commemoration. However, our friend, Sean Johnstone, and his Kiwi colleague, Bruce Blackburn of the Pilgrim Bandits of NZ, represented the units on the day. Sean and Bruce laid that had been delivered by Trevor Baker, the son of the Battle of Crete veteran, Jack Baker (see top two photos on next page). As we thought that we had missed the

start of the commemorations, having arrived on 23 May, I contacted Sean to ascertain what other services would be taking place during our visit. He said that the main one was the Souda Bay commemoration on Saturday 27 May and that he would be attending, so we arranged to meet up there. The service was probably the main one for Crete and many national and international dignitaries were there. This service culminated with a flypast from a 30 Squadron A400M Atlas.

We spent the first week of our holiday visiting some of the sites that were important in May and June 1941. On the 28th May we drove across the mountains to Sfakia. Sfakia is a small port/fishing harbour on the South of the island. It is where the allied troops of 1941 walked to, to be evacuated from Crete. Little did we know it but our visit was the 82nd anniversary to the beginning of that evacuation. The present journey, via mountain road from Maleme to Sfakia is about 53 miles.

The next day, 29 May we visited the historic Hill 107, a location somewhat off the beaten track. To get there from Maleme head for the German Cemetery. Instead of turning right down the road to the German Cemetery one needs to continue up a very narrow road. Eventually there is a track to the right that leads up a very dusty track to Hill 107. Strangely, the track to the right is signposted for anyone approaching from the North, but not the South! Hill 107 is marked with a wooden cross and to the right of it is a small Chapel. Close by there is a bunker which is in a very dilapidated state but there are local moves afoot to renovate it into a historic building.

The next day, 30 May, we continued past the turning to the German Cemetery and visited Maleme. This included the Memorial at Maleme and the historic Tavronitis bridge. As the 30 and 33 Squadron Memorial is on the bend just after the Hellenic Forces Camp and Maleme Airfield we visited the Memorial first. This is when we became aware that another service had taken place on Friday 26 May, attended by families and dignitaries who left more wreaths alongside those laid by Sean and Bruce.

Just across the road, on a very sharp bend, there is some scrubland. This scrubland is very close to the perimeter of the airfield at Maleme. However, walking further, the land opens out to expose the beginnings of Tavronitis bridge, (Photo 9). It is possible to walk across



Sean and Bruce at the 30 & 33 Memorial.



The 30 & 33 Memorial.



The Souda Bay Commemoration Service.



A 30 Sqn A400M Atlas overflying Souda Bay.



The Evacuation Memorial at Sfakia.



Hill 107.

this bridge and although it appears to be a little shaky under foot, I believe it is strong enough for individuals to walk on it - after all, I did! Studying some photos after my walk across it there is apparently battle damage, however I did not notice any. When I reached Tavronitis at the far end of the bridge I turned around and walked back (Photo 10). When I got back to our car, we drove over the new Travronitis bridge and looked at the old bridge from the underside (Photo 11). There was one interesting discovery, which was that a section of the bridge appears to be abandoned to the side of the bridge (Photo 12).

Our man in Crete, Sean Johnstone, is ex-RAF Regiment and he and his wife, Helen, have lived in Crete for several years. They live reasonably close to Maleme and they own and run a holiday apartment, the Arete Apartments (www.aretecrete.com) . Not only are they very active in the Turtle Conservation Programme but Sean is also a member of a Crete Society for the Battle of Crete history. Sean has represented 33 Squadron for several years at the Memorial and he is also involved with the care of the Memorial.

I would recommend any Association member, or anyone else interested in the Battle of Crete, to make the trip. It can be done quite cheaply and does not necessarily require a full-blown package holiday trip. I would suggest a cheap flight to Chania (EasyJet or similar) and you can hire a car for your visit at the airport. The visit can be done over a couple of days. Hotel or Airbnb accommodation between Chania and Maleme is achievable, a distance less than 15 miles.



Hill 107 turn off –for northerners only?



Maleme Memorial post-26 May service.



Photo 9 - Tavronitis Bridge.



Photo 10 - Tavronitis Bridge.



Photo 11 - Tavronitis Bridge.



Photo 12. Tavronitis Bridge.



DICK & LIS'S
Concise Illustrated
Battlefield Guide
TEN DAYS IN
THE LOW
COUNTRIES

Ypres

The Somme

Mons

Thiepval

Waterloo

Mimoyecques

RAF Laarbruch

The Reichwald Forest

Overloon

A Travelogue by Dick and Lis - the new Major & Mrs Holt?

It is possible that a great many of you may have come across a Historical Military Arms Dealer called Bruce Crompton and his TV programme on Discovery Channel called 'Combat Dealers'. Bruce has built up a considerable reputation of both tracking down and renovating Second World War Equipment and selling them on to collectors all around the world.

Prior to COVID Lis—my 'better half' and 'Partner in crime' - were following Bruce and his sale of a German Half Track (Sd.Kfz.251) to an Australian collector / museum. This particular sale culminated in Bruce taking the aforementioned Half Track to the Tracks and Trade meeting held during the annual Militracks event at the 'Oorlogmuseum Overloon' (Overloon War Museum), located on the Dutch / German border midway between Venlo and Nijmegen. The area might be familiar to some of you if you have ever served at RAF Laarbruch. The event is held in the forest surrounding the museum and Overloon itself witnessed one of the bloodiest battles in the Netherlands between 30 September-18 October 1944 as the Allies tried to secure the narrow salient established between Eindhoven and Nijmegen during Operation MARKET GARDEN and destroy the German bridgehead west of the Meuse in preparation for advances across the Rhine into Germany.

Well over a hundred and fifty World War Two vehicles of all descriptions take part in this two-day event in May, along with over seven hundred stalls selling all types of militaria. The other wonderful thing about this event is for a small fee you can ride in Half tracks, Motor Bikes, and all sorts of other Second World War military vehicles through the forest. Bruce was successful in his sale of the 'German Half Track' and both Lis and I said that Militracks looked amazing and we should try to attend. Well, COVID delayed that until this year, but I will come back to the event later in this article.

At the beginning of this year we made our plans for a ten-day trip to both visit Militracks and the First World Battle fields of Ypres, Somme, Mons along with Waterloo and two military sites adjacent to Calais.

On arrival in Calais we made our way to the first site which is called 'Battery Todt'. The 'Battery' or 'Turm' in German consisted of four casements housing 380mm guns which along with other batteries and 'Railway Guns' regularly duelled across the channel with British Batteries, namely 'Winne' and 'Pooh' and the

'Wadstone Battery' located to the West of St Margaret's adjacent to Dover. Sadly, the Museum which is in one of the 'Turms' was closed as it was a Monday; however, a short way from the Museum was a deserted 'Turm' which we were able to partially explore. All I will say is that my photos of these 'Turms' do not prepare you for their enormity and the construction of them which is quite staggering - the Germans knew how to pour concrete! I will come back to 'Battery Todt' later.

We had another World War Two site to visit just a short drive from 'Battery Todt' near Mimoyecques. The village lies just to the west of Calais and this site may be familiar to the members who participated on our Battlefield Tour in 2019. 'Fortress Mimoyecques' was the site of 'Hitler's V-3 wonder weapon, designed to house 25 enormous gun barrels 130 meters long, with a calibre of 150 mm, and would have been the biggest guns in the world. The site is set in the countryside and is very remote, with a network of tunnels dug underground in a chalk hill by thousands of slave labourers. Five long tunnels were cut through the chalk and if it had come online would have fired a barrage of rocket assisted projectiles at London every 12 seconds. Fortunately, the RAF discovered the site and although what they found initially through photo reconnaissance set hares racing, the site was never fully operational.

Described as a 'Heavy Crossbow' target within Bomber Command's Operation CROSSBOW target lists, 617 Squadron dropped Tallboy bombs on the site and caused such damage that work ceased on the site on 30 July 1944. There is a suggestion, however, that the site did manage some test firing, with a projectile landing on Maidstone. Incredibly, the Germans also used one of the systems during the Battle of the Bulge'. From a technical point of view it is still not fully understood to this day how the system fully worked, but it is well worth a visit if you are in the area and there is a brief description on pages 72-78 of the 2019 Tour Additional Reading Material booklet on the Squadron History section of our website

After leaving 'Fortress Mimoyecques' we headed for Ypres for our night stop. Our stayover in Ypres was twofold: we love Ypres and the surrounding area, and the other reason was to locate the memorial to Lieutenant Colonel Edgar Mobbs. Colonel Edgar Mobbs came from Northampton and was a renowned rugby player for Northampton Saints' and was a capable cricketer. He was killed on 31 July 1917 at Lower Star



The Todt Battery_ Turm 3.



The entrance to the Mimoyecques V-3 complex.



This fifty-three-ton steel plate was recovered from the top of the Mimoyecques site and covered the shaft from which the rockets would have exited.



**The memorial to Lt Col Edgar Robert Mobbs DSO
7th Battalion, The Northampton Regiment
(1882-1917).**

Post in Shrewsbury Forest while attempting to bomb a machine gun post that had trapped a detachment of his Battalion. His body was never found, his name is one of the thousands inscribed on the Menin Gate. When I was growing up, I attended the Mobbs Memorial rugby match every year. Through the power of Facebook, I came across a posting from a Northampton website showing pictures of the memorial cross in Shrewsbury Forest marking the last known position of his Battalion, with a set of coordinates. As a point of interest, Mobbs used to start every attack the same way - he would kick a rugby ball towards the enemy!!!

Arriving on site we discovered that the coordinates and the hand drawn map turned out to be incorrect. Over an hour later, having had no luck, a local arrived on a bike and on speaking to him he said 'follow me'! Off we went, following him for about a kilometre until we arrived at another entrance to the forest and yes, there was the memorial - a simple wooden cross, approximately six feet tall, surrounded by wooden crosses and a rugby ball. We paid our respects and planted a wooden cross then headed for our accommodation in Ypres. As we had discovered in 2019, the accommodation in town was excellent and we enjoyed a fantastic evening meal in one of the town's lovely restaurants that night.

The next morning, after an outstanding breakfast, we retraced our route from the following day as we had passed Hill 60 and the 'Caterpillar Crater', which we wanted to visit before heading off to the Vimy Ridge memorial and the Somme battlefield. It is quite an amazing site on lots of levels, with Caterpillar Crater the result of massive detonations in two mines on the morning of 7 June 1917; it is well worth a visit.

I should give special thanks to Paul Davies at this point. Paul has undertaken extensive tours of Ypres and the Somme and he had forwarded me his itinerary, along with two guides produced by Major Holt and his wife plus a further publication by Rose Coombes called 'Beyond Endeavours Fade', which is a definitive guide to the First World War battle fields. Her book proved invaluable to understanding the battlefield and advising what and where to visit.

As we headed south towards the Somme it was hard to visualise that the trenches stretched for over 475 miles, approximately from the North Sea to Switzerland, and as we travelled further south, essentially following the front line, slowly but surely the topography of the land changed and large, formidable ridges came into view. Suddenly we could make out the memorial to Canada sited on what we know today as Vimy Ridge, rising high above Hill 145.

The striking memorial, unveiled by King Edward VIII in 1936, is the centrepiece of a 240-acre park owned in

perpetuity by Canada and commemorates over 11 000 Canadian soldiers dead who have no known grave. The Vimy Ridge museum is well worth a visit, staffed by young Canadians who undertake a six-month 'tour of duty'. The area around the museum is still heavily pockmarked and with the original trench system still visible. It should be noted that the preamble to this battle commenced with a series of tunnels which housed a considerable number of allied soldiers. In fact, over six miles of tunnels were constructed initially and that rose to over twenty miles of tunnels and these tunnels were incredibly complex in their construction. These tunnels along with radio communications between the allied forces led to the success of the Canadian allied attack in overwhelming the Germans and seizing the heights. It is also worth noting that you can visit one of the tunnel complexes at the museum which certainly puts the tunnel construction and use into perspective. The only small negative concerning the site is that there is nowhere to get any form of refreshment unlike other sites we visited on the Somme later.

From Vimy Ridge we continued southwards to the Somme and Hawthorn Ridge where, at 7.20am on 1 July 1916, a mine of the 252 Engineer Company was exploded, blowing up the trenches of the German *Infanterie - Regiment 119*. This location is recognised as the start of the Battle of the Somme, the blackest day in the history of the British Army. Eight minutes later a further seventeen mines were exploded. Some 60 000 soldiers in fourteen Divisions climbed out of their trenches along an 18-mile front and advanced towards the German lines. When the day closed there were 60 000 casualties - 21 000 dead, 35 000 wounded and six hundred prisoners with no appreciable gains whatsoever. The Battle of the Somme continued for a further four and half months at a cost of over 400 000 casualties with a gain of just 13 km.

A short distance from Hawthorn Ridge is the Newfoundland Memorial Park, again staffed by Canadian young people. This is a small site, just forty acres, but deeply moving in all respects. The losses here on 1 July 1916 were staggering, with over 85 % of the regiment lost. Again, the Newfoundland and Labrador people own this sacred ground. The entire site is as it was when war ceased in 1918 and the subsequent battles on this site did little to change the site. The park is dominated by an impressive Caribou monument to the fallen. The park is extremely easy to traverse, and you cannot come away without a feeling of deep sadness at the losses sustained that day by the Newfoundland Regiment.

We then made our way to our accommodation at 'Battery Farm' just below and to the north of the Thiépval monument and a short distance from the



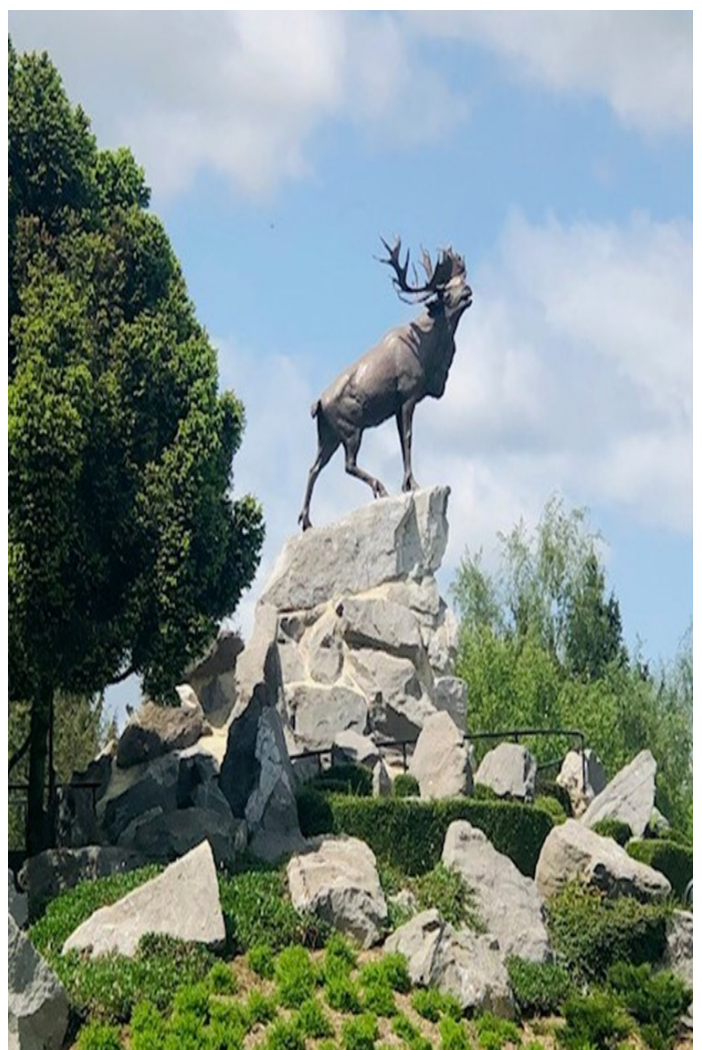
The Caterpillar Crater adjacent to Hill 60.



One of the tunnels under Vimy Ridge.



The Canadian memorial at Vimy Ridge.



The monument at the Newfoundland Memorial Park.

town of Albert. Our hosts for the next two nights were lovely, and our accommodation was fine if not a little dated. As the old saying goes it is a small world and the wife greeted us in perfect English with the statement that she had only been to the UK once and that was to visit a penfriend in Northampton – my hometown! We did laugh.

The next morning, after a superb breakfast, our host talked to us about the local area, 'Battery Farm' and its use by the Germans as a Gun Battery. She then took us to show us her 'Iron Harvest' which are remnants of shell casings and other artifacts that have been tilled up on the farmland, adding that she has a remarkably close relationship with French EOD who provide additions to her collection. She went on to say that as well as the 'Iron Harvest', bodies from the War are also uncovered.

After leaving our location we headed into Albert and visited the Somme Museum - outstanding in all respects. We then headed off to the Lochnager Crater and other locations along the Somme front line. The Lochnager Crater was deeply moving and enormous in its scale. If anyone has read 'Sagittarius Rising' by Cecil Lewis, a RFC pilot who witnessed the explosion, in which he wrote that the earth heaved and the debris went to a height of 4 000 feet. This crater, along with many other locations, are deeply moving because looking across the landscape you cannot help but think of all those persons who have no known grave. We visited the South African Memorial in Delville Wood which is simply stunning in its beauty and complexity and is set in a wood. Just one tree remains from 1916 and trench lines and shell pockmarks can still be clearly seen in the wood. We took a short walk into the wood, as far as safety allowed, which left us both with a feeling that we were being watched, although of course there was no one else there – a very strange feeling indeed.

Our tour of the Somme continued the next day to the Thiepval Memorial and its Visitors Centre, which carries the names of 73 000 men from Britain and South Africa who have no known grave. The Centre, and the views from the memorial, are excellent. The Ulster Tower is also close by which is modelled on a tower in Northern Ireland and is a popular landmark. The Tower is run by the Northern Ireland Somme Association and husband and wife teams come out for several months to run the excellent tearoom and conduct tours of the trenches adjacent to the Tower. Further reading on the Tower and aerial photos revealed that the Tower straddles the former German line. The couple reside in the Tower and the Visitors Centre and tearoom, along with the artifacts held in the Tower are excellent and it is an outstanding Pit Stop.

As you travel around the Somme Battlefield and read

the various publications you will come across countless examples of how the troops on the ground referred to various locations with their own slang. An excellent example of this is Mouquet Farm, a German strong point of considerable magnitude. The British and Australians referred to it as 'Mucky Farm' or 'Moo Cow Farm' respectively.

After two nights on the Somme we headed for Mons where the British Expeditionary Force first engaged the Germans in August 1914. On arrival in Mons, we first visited a house that Van Gogh stayed in when he decided to become a minister in the church. The house and Visitors Centre are excellent but his period there was incredibly sad indeed. Moving on we located the Nimy railway bridge across the canal which bisects Mons.

It was here that Lieutenant Maurice Dease and Private Sidney Godley of the 4th Battalion, The Royal Fusiliers, defended the bridge on 23 August 1914 after every man of the machine-gun section had been killed or wounded trying to stem the German advance and permit the battalions of their division to retire to new positions. Dease continued to fire until he was so gravely wounded at which point Godley took over and continued firing until his wounds prevented him from carrying on. After dismantling the gun and throwing the pieces into the canal, Godley tried to crawl to safety, but was captured by the Germans and spent the rest of the war as a POW until November 1918.

It was said that Dease, who died of his wounds, became the inspiration for the cartoon figure 'Old Bill'. Both men became the recipients of the first VCs of the Great War and there is a memorial at the bridge to them both. The BEF, described as that 'Contemptible Little Army' by the Kaiser, fought with such ferocity against a force ten times their number that they thwarted the German invasion plan, and became known popularly as 'The Old Contemptibles' and my old neighbour, 'Mr Blatchford' was one of them.

That afternoon in Mons we met up with Zoe Fowler and her husband along with other work colleagues and their dogs. In my time Zoe was an admin SAC on 33 Squadron and we had a great meet up. The venue was a superb pub by a lake and Zoe is now a FS and secretary to a three star senior officer in Mons. In the evening we stayed in an outstanding B&B just outside of Waterloo which was quite amazing in all respects.

The next morning it was only a short drive to the Waterloo battlefield. The famous battle is well documented, but apart from the battlefield we were not sure what we were going to see. Well, we were in for a surprise as it was, without doubt, one of the finest museums and visitor centres we have ever been in. Google it! We visited Hougomont Farm, which was



The 'Iron Harvest'.



The Lochnagar Crater.



Delville Wood.



The Ulster Tower.

the scene of fierce fighting throughout the whole of the battle. The Hougoumont battle has often been characterised as a diversionary attack to cause Wellington to move reserves to his threatened right flank to protect his communications, but this then escalated into an all-day battle which drew in more and more French troops but just a handful of Wellington's, thus having the exact opposite effect to that intended. In fact, there is a good case that both Napoleon and Wellington thought Hougoumont was a vital part of the battle. Certainly, Wellington declared afterwards that "the success of the battle turned upon the closing of the gates at Hougoumont".

After the battle and intervening years, the site had become dilapidated but was fully restored in time for the 200th anniversary of the battle and opened to the public on 18 June 2015 by the now King Charles and Queen Camilla. The Waterloo battlefield is well worth a visit if you are in the area. We then travelled onto Goch in Germany via the Overloon Museum to attend Militracks and the Tracks and Trade event.

Our accommodation in Goch was superb, located in a Hotel / Pub that was excellent and with wonderful meals available. After a fantastic breakfast the next morning off we set for the Militracks site, which was only a short hop away. It is a superbly organised event and after we parked up we walked through the forest to join the queue, observe all types of vehicles making their way around the forest - Hetzers, Stugs, halftracks and the like. On entering the site, which encompasses the museum and is set in a forest with Bailey bridges and other obstacles, it became clear this was a huge event. The size of the tented militaria village was immense. It was well laid out with lots of catering and other facilities including large tents to sit and eat like being on 'Det'!! We strolled around the militaria and were stopped in our tracks (pardon the pun!) by the most incredible selection of 1/20 scale fully functioning remote control tanks which had to be seen to be believed, with fully functioning manikins on and in the tanks. Quite incredible - God only knows the cost of these models. The militaria site was amazing regarding what was being sold from clothing to parts of vehicles, military equipment of all descriptions and even the 'For Freedom Museum' in Belgium having a stand.

The Museum on site is simply amazing, not only in its construction but also due to the incredible artifacts it displays. Mitchell bomber, Spitfire, an incredible array of military equipment and interactive displays. Stand out exhibits must be the full sized Horsa glider and the complete remains of a Lancaster and the poignant way it is displayed. Outside in the forest was an enormous screen displaying by live feed what was going on onsite. They also showed films, and one in particular was a film taken after the battle of Overloon with local children

playing on all of the military equipment that had been left abandoned, both allied and German in the forest. 'Elf and Safety' would have thrown a fit! It was an amazing film though which took me back to my childhood in the fifties and early sixties when we used to get up with all sorts of nonsense.

In addition to visiting Overloon and Militracks we visited the museum at RAF Laarbruch. The display and artifacts offer an excellent record of Laarbruch's operational history in all respects. The base is now a civilian airfield but you can still get around parts of it which, if you served there, will take you back. However, like several large ex-military bases in Germany it is incredibly sad to see how certain areas are very run down.

On our last day at Militracks we made our way straight to the arena where for five euros each we rode in an SPF 7 - a large German half-track used to pull 88mm anti-aircraft guns - which was a wonderful experience. Finally, we had another great wander around the entire site before setting off for the Reichwald Forest, adjacent to Goch, which was the scene of fierce fighting in 1945. There we located the Commonwealth Grave site which holds the remains of two Dambuster crews who lost their lives.

The following day we set off for Lille via Antwerp. Well, we called into Antwerp which turned out to be a disappointment. We were due to stay in Lille for several nights but again this proved a complete let down and we were able to cancel our accommodation. What now I said to Lis - Ypres she said, and we fell on our feet staying in an outstanding B&B on a farm just outside Ypres. Superb accommodation, breakfasts and hosts in all respects and located on what was formerly the 'German Front Line'. That evening after a meal in Ypres we drove around the local area and viewed a couple of sites which included the 'Peace Pool' the site of another mine explosion before heading back to our accommodation for the night.

The next morning, we headed for Ploegsteert or, as the British referred to it, 'Plugstreet'. It was the scene of fierce fighting. The museum at 'Plugstreet' is outstanding and necessary to visit with its interactive displays. Close by is the memorial to the dead and a short drive from 'Plugstreet' is the site of the 'Christmas Day' unofficial truce and 'Football Match'. Also close to the 'Memorial to the Dead' is a series of bunkers still in use by the farmer which stand adjacent to what was known as 'Hyde Park Corner' which is worth a visit. 'Plugstreet' is dominated by the Messines Ridge. Messines was the site of desperate carnage and was initially captured by the Irish and New Zealand divisions in 1917. In 1918 Messines changed hands many times until it was finally wrested back by the



Nimy Railway Bridge, Mons.



The Lion's Mound, Waterloo.



The Battle of Waterloo Memorial at Hougomont.



SPF-7 at Militracks at the Overloon Museum.

Allies in September 1918. Messines church crypt was a German First Aid station where a certain Adolf Hitler was dealt with.

We slowly made our way back to Ypres, taking in an amazing set of British Bunkers at Langhof Farm (see photo right), then it was onto the Essex Farm Dressing Station memorial and CWGC just north of Ypres. Essex Farm is where Canadian Medical Officer John McCrae who had served with the Artillery in the Boer War, had written what is the war's best known poem 'Flanders Field' when he served in a simple earthen dugout in the spring of 1915. In the CWGC graveyard lies the body of 15-year-old Private Strudwick, testimony to those conflict. He is not the youngest, some as young as 12 years old were captured by the Germans and interned. We then moved north to Pilckem Ridge to view a well-known German bunker and the site where Private Thomas Whitham of the Coldstream Guards won his VC on 31 July 1917. I filmed the site and his memorial and sent it to a family friend. Surviving the conflict Whitham struggled to find work when he returned home to Burnley. He was forced to sell his VC and the gold watch that Burnley council had presented him in recognition of his bravery, and he died in poverty aged 36. 'A land fit for heroes'?

That evening we rounded up our busy day in and around Ypres, a town we had only scratched the surface of, with another superb evening meal. The next day after bidding our goodbyes to our superb hosts we took a short drive out to the Todt Battery just west of Calais on what is known as Gris-Nez.

The history of the Artillery Batteries on Gris-Nez goes back to 1888 – 1904 when the French Navy established a battery of four 95mm guns, installed in pairs. A new battery of 100mm guns was installed in January 1940 but they were quickly overrun by the Germans as the Battle of France reached its conclusion. They then set about installing several batteries, the largest being Battery Todt which consisted of four guns installed in what the Germans called *Turms*. Construction started in August 1940, each *Turm* being reinforced with eight hundred tons of scrap iron and a total of 12000 m³ of concrete. The battery was completed in February 1942. These *Turms* as I have previously stated are simply enormous in all respects. The Battery was initially named 'Siegfried' but after Fritz Todt, a senior figure in the Nazi Party and the founder of *Organisation Todt*, was killed on 8 February 1942, when his aircraft crashed soon after taking off from Hitler's *Wolfsschanze* (Wolf's Lair) in East Prussia, the battery was renamed 'Todt' in his honour.

Each *Turm* or Casemate was constructed identically. They measured over thirty metres high with ten metres below ground level. Their length was forty-seven



metres and they had a width of over thirty metres, with the thickness of the walls measuring three and half metres. The total weight of each *Turm* is approximately 160,000 tons. Each *Turm* contains facilities for the storage of shells and charges on the ground floor whilst the basement was taken up with plant rooms, generators, workshops and barrack rooms.

In respect to the firing chamber, it consisted of a vast amphitheatre. At its centre was a thirty-eight square metre turret measuring 9 x 6 x 8 metres wide. The barrel alone weighed 105 tonne and each *Turm* had a firing chart recording shells fired. The range of the battery was over thirty-five miles and the whole battery was served by four officers, forty-nine non-commissioned officers and 337 mariners. Most mariners were housed in ten barracks or in eight concrete shelters due to lack of space in the casemates. All four casemates were linked by a railway and a complete circular defence of the whole battery was complete with additional twenty bunkers housing anti-tank guns and an extensive minefield. Finally, there were extensive anti-aircraft defences to protect the entire site.

In September 1945, the site was surrounded by the Canadians who finally took the site, but not before they continued to fire on Folkstone and Dover. The RAF led the assault, dropping two thousand tons of bombs on the site before the Canadians finally stormed the battery with the capture of over 1700 Germans.

The Todt Battery museum is located in *Turm* 1 and frankly is a must to visit. It was bought by an Englishman in 1970 who turned the site into an amazing museum so if you have a few hours to kill it is just 25 minutes from Calais, so take a look at its website and the great thing is you can also visit the remains of *Turm* 3 which are close by.

Well, that concludes our ten-day trip I hope you found this article / travelogue interesting.

Dick & Lis



Militracks—vehicles, various.



British bunkers at Hyde Park Corner, Ploegsteert.



Essex Farm Advanced Dressing Station.



1914 Christmas Truce Memorial, Messines.



K-5 Railway guns at the Todt Museum.



Let's give thanks and a warm welcome to our latest Honorary Member....Sean Johnstone

Πολλές ευχαριστίες και ένα θερμό καλωσόρισμα στο τελευταίο επίτιμο μέλος μας....Sean Johnstone



At the beginning of August, over in Crete, near Maleme, the wonders of this modern technology we oldies are baffled by came to the fore, allowing Association members to watch a rather special task being carried out 'almost live'. Courtesy of MAcr (OR-9) Gareth Attridge's wife and her video recording skills on her mobile phone, we saw Gareth present a certificate of Honorary Membership to Sean Johnstone before reading out an excellent congratulatory letter from the Chairman, Dick Brewster. After that Gareth presented Sean with a plaque from 33 Squadron and the 33 Squadron Association, a small symbol of gratitude for everything that Sean has done to preserve the legacy of 33 Squadron, and 30 Squadron, in Crete. Gareth also presented Sean with a model Hurricane in 33 Squadron colours, as flown by Pilot Officer Wade.

We then heard Sean, who lives close to the Memorial at Maleme, is ex-RAF Regiment - thus the penguin pictures- and has been involved with battlefield tour visits to Crete for several years, say a few words. Clearly touched by his well-deserved award of Honorary Membership, Sean wrote on the Association's Facebook page later that evening:

Thank you so much 33 Squadron and 33 Squadron Association for bestowing this Honorary Membership on me. Like all of us who do voluntary activities we don't expect anything in return, so this acknowledgement of my efforts was a humbling and unexpected surprise. I would like to take this opportunity to say that as long as I am fit and well I will endeavour to support any events organised by 33 Squadron and other RAF, Army & RN units. The Battle of Crete's history is one to be proud of and the RAF's part in that battle, and during the occupation period, was full of heroic sacrifice by both air and ground crews.

One of my reasons for being so passionate about the RAF history here at Maleme was meeting my veteran friend, Jack Baker (RIP). Some of you may remember meeting him during previous May 'Battle of Crete' memorials. Although he was ex- 30 Squadron he reached out to all the serving RAF members and was such a humble and caring human being. Listening to his personal account of his experience during the Battle of Crete and his amazing escape opened my eyes to what our RAF predecessors went through 80+ years ago.

An important point I would like to make is that as the last of our veterans pass away it is left to us to keep the memory of the battle alive. To that end, as the Vice President of the 'Cretan Commemoration Committee



(CCC) - the Battle of Crete and the Resistance', and now an Honorary Member of the 33 Squadron Association, please feel free to ask for any support you may need in any future events in Crete.

Lastly but not least, thank you to Gaz Attridge, for keeping the history alive and for having done so much in support of the veterans, like our dear friend Jack Baker.

Sean has known Gareth for several years, the picture on the next page shows them standing in front of the Maleme Memorial on 20 May 2017, with Gareth standing next to Jack Baker in the photo below it. He is



Jack Baker and MAcr Gareth Attridge at Maleme.



One example of the private militaria collections on Crete.



75th Anniversary: Sean with some of the Maoris in the NZ contingent at Galatas.



May 2021 Battle of Crete 80th Anniversary Exhibition - Sean with his CCC colleagues. They had 3000 visitors in 10 days.

heavily involved with a number of committees and societies on the island, and his Facebook page shows many photos of Sean on Battlefield Tours with people from around the world. The members of 33 Squadron who have been over to Crete with the Standard Party know Sean well, and he has a lot of contact with museums and military collectors. As a Battlefield Tour guide with military experience of his own, Sean has a great understanding of the Battle of Crete and the resistance that followed during the repressive and cruel German occupation.

The New Zealanders who have visited Crete clearly think highly of Sean, as they have given him the gift of *pounamu*, the hard stone that plays an important role in Maori culture and is considered a *taonga* (treasure), which increases in *mana* (spiritual power or prestige) as they pass from one generation to another. George Roney has an engraved piece of *pounamu* on his grave at Schoondijke, and the Roney family presented the Association with a piece of *pounamu* at the end of the 2017 tour, a gift that now hangs with George Roney's picture in 33 Squadron's hangar.

The Pilgrim Bandits of NZ mentioned earlier in Graham Lowe's piece came over to Crete to walk the evacuation trail used by Allied troops in 1941, and they also visited, and joined, Sean's rugby team - Cretan Gunners RFC. The Gunners are always keen to welcome touring rugby teams over there!

The CCC was developed by people who wanted to maintain the memory of the Battle of Crete and honour the veterans and those who gave their lives during that period of Cretan history. As shown in the previous photo of Sean and his colleagues, the CCC organised a 10 day exhibition from 20-30 May 2021, in cooperation with the Municipality of Chania and the Centre of Mediterranean Architecture. Using unique and authentic exhibits from the historical archives of researchers and collectors in the area, they were able to display unpublished photographs and rare artifacts in order to maintain and preserve the memory of the battle. The exhibition, which drew in over 3 000 visitors over the 10 day period, including the British Ambassador, was the foundation stone for future educational activities and events and I am sure that the Association would find such an exhibition, or viewing of some of the private collections known to Sean, fascinating.

In recognition of all that Sean and his colleagues are doing to maintain the memory of the Battle, of the veterans who fought there, of those who lie there still, and the role of our own Squadron in the Greece and Crete campaigns, the award of Honorary Membership is fully, and richly, deserved. Long may you continue to tell the stories Sean, and I hope that you can lead us on an organised Battlefield Tour one day.



Sean Johnstone standing proud at the Souda Bay Memorial.

My apologies if the Greek translation in the header is not correct, blame Google Translate! It's great to have you supporting us, great to have you as part of the Association, and we all wish you and Helen continued success with all of your projects and interests.

Αφοσίωση



CRETAN COMMEMORATIONS COMMITTEE

The Battle of Crete and the resistance