

## RAFA Annual Conference – Blackpool, 13 – 15 May 2016

*Alain L. Dardelin*

This year's Annual Conference was held at the sea-front Hilton Hotel in Blackpool in place of the regular Winter Gardens. It is reckoned that around 350 members attended, including delegates and visitors from Branches of the UK, mainland Europe and overseas.

The Conference was opened by the Mayor of Blackpool Councillor Peter Callow, RAFA President Air Marshal Sir Dusty Miller and the Chairman of the Annual Conference Committee (ACC) Mr Anthony "Taff" Rees. The Silent Tribute was led by the Venerable Jonathan Chaffey, Chaplain-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force. The music was provided by the RAF Cranwell College Band throughout the weekend.

Sir Dusty informed Conference that a video link was being tested with 8 Branches at RAF St Mawgan, which may become a reality, if successful, for those members who may not be able to travel to venues but yet allow them to participate in debates and possibly cast their votes.

The Secretary General, Mr Nick Bunting, reported on the Association's achievements during 2015 and projections for the future to rejuvenate it. Current membership is near the 62,000 mark, and plans are to see a net growth of 10% in 2016. Objectives call for a provision of more welfare care; added support to serving personnel and veterans alike with regard to mental health and well-being; combat loneliness and isolation with an increase in volunteers and befrienders to keep the vital contact with members. Other areas such as Storybook Wings, free wi-fi at RAF stations, refurbishment of contact houses remain a priority.



The Swiss Branch delegation: L-R Nick Meyer, Régis Pizot, Margaret Duff BEM, Bryan Pattison OBE and Alain Dardelin.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Andrew Pulford, gave his final address to Conference before he retires in the weeks to come. He provided a comprehensive update on current RAF activities, operations and aircraft capabilities. He stated that the RAF is committed more than ever in the present troubled world with an increase in Combat Air and Intelligence Surveillance, Targeting Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR). Operations are wide and varied involving aircraft such as Typhoon, Tornado, Sentinel and Shadow from the Falkland Islands to the Middle East, from the Baltic States to southern Europe. Following his address Sir Andrew presented the Flying Scholarships to the 6 successful Cadets.

Sir Dusty Miller then presented the National Presidential Certificates to 14 members. During the Conference, the outgoing Chief of the Air Staff and the retiring Chairman of Central Council, AVM Nigel



Bairsto, were both made Life Vice-Presidents, the latter was amongst those who received a National Presidential Certificate.

Conference business continued with presentations of the Annual Conference Committee report by its Chairman, Taff Rees, followed by that of AVM Nigel Bairsto, Chairman of Central Council and Mr Philip Tagg, Honorary Treasurer who gave a comprehensive financial and auditor's report for 2015.

Results of the elections to Central Council were announced. Twelve nominations had been received for the eight positions plus one for election to the ACC. Our Branch Chairman, Bryan Pattison, received the most votes and is re-elected for the period 2016 – 2018. He was also re-elected Vice-Chairman of Central Council at its meeting immediately following Conference. Congratulations Bryan. AVM John Cliffe was elected by acclaim to succeed AVM Nigel Bairsto as Chairman of Central Council.

The morning session was adjourned at 12:30 till 13:30 for lunch, which then gave me a chance to hand out copies of the Swiss Branch Respite Break Fund flyer, and briefly introduce the scheme to individuals.

Business was then resumed with the presentation of no less than 40 Resolutions, but prior to that Bryan Pattison as Chairman of the Review Group of the Royal Charter, Rules and Bye-Laws together with two of his colleagues, Smokey Furness and AVM John Cliffe, introduced the work of the group over the past year. Many of the Resolutions referred to proposed changes to the Rules etc.

On Saturday evening, Trophies were presented during the Gala Evening. The RAF College Band provided a smart marching display, while Ms Lizzy Rushby sang iconic songs with a touch of nostalgia.

On Sunday morning, the final day of Conference started with the parade of Standards and Area Flights led by the RAF College Band. The Mayor of Blackpool and the President took the salute. This was followed by the Service of Dedication at the War Memorial conducted by the Venerable Jonathan Chaffey, and a flypast by Hurricane PZ865 of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF). Many onlookers stopped and trams slowed down as a mark of respect during the 2-minute silence.



The Agenda not having been completed on the Saturday afternoon, we returned to the conference room at the Hilton for the presentation of Parade Trophies and the “would-be” debates on remaining and final Resolutions. The smartest Flight on parade trophy went to the Wales, Midland and South Western Area. A total of 29 resolutions were carried, 4 were lost, 1 was withdrawn and 6 were not debated including the one proposed by the Swiss Branch: *“This Conference encourages those responsible for RAFA communications and data management to improve administration and information flow in a way which acknowledges the role of Branches in supporting the Membership”*.

Those Resolutions not discussed will be considered by Central Council at its meeting on 7 September as Conference had to close at the publicised time of 13:00.

The Conference closed after the vote of thanks was given by Taff Rees and the National and Area Standards were paraded out. All in all, it was an enjoyable Conference week-end animated by the same spirit of friendship all-around.

In 2017 and 2018, the Annual Conference venue will leave the southern and north-west coast of England for the Yarnfield Park Training and Conference Centre located in the heart of the Midlands between Manchester and Birmingham.





Brian Wanstall and Sabine Schofield, with our Life President looking in very good spirits.



Jonathan Pitt, Marianne Wanstall and John Heptonstall.

## Summer Lunch – Yvoire, 4 June 2016

The tradition continues – just as the membership wished it to.

The sun began to shine a little later in the day this year, limiting our opportunity to enjoy an Apéro out of doors. This slight change in plan did not prevent 45 RAFA, RBL and BRA Members from filling the Yvoire Hotel du Port's lakeside restaurant to accept the hotel's kind offer of pre-lunch drinks and thereafter to partake in the ever popular *Filets de Perches* lunch. The large *Coupe Glacée* that followed the main course was especially well-received by those having a sweet tooth.



Michael and Pammy Type

In welcoming everyone, Bryan Pattison called for a toast in celebration of The Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Thereafter, the ambience of this social occasion provided a perfect opportunity for friends to mix, chat and also meet new faces. Speaking on behalf of RBL and BRA members present, Michael Type recorded appreciation to RAFA and to the event organiser, Alan Baker (*I blush...*) for again initiating and managing what has become an integral part of the annual schedule of social events.



Eric Schaefer, Joe Smith, Di Klein, Kurt Klein, Des

One often hears, in business, the phrase "*if it ain't broke, don't fix it*".

The RAFA-Swiss Committee has therefore earmarked Saturday 3 June 2017, in Yvoire, for next year's Summer Lunch. See you there.



Alan Baker, Sheila Nicolet, Brita Baker

Alan Baker.



Charles Jefford, Rosemary Billinge, Susan Jefford



A general view of the company showing a real full house.



## 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the crash of Lancaster ED412 of 207 Squadron Royal Air Force



Some 30 Members and friends of the Swiss Branch attended a ceremony in scorching weather, commemorating the 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the crash of Lancaster ED412 at the Monument down by the lake at Le Bouveret on 17 July.

The President of the Commune of Port-Valais, Mr Pierre Zoppelletto, welcomed those present to Le Bouveret prior to the

Branch Chaplain, Roy Damary, conducting the short service during which wreaths were laid on behalf of the British Embassy and the Swiss Branch of RAFA. Various people had been asked to say some of the prayers. A message was read from 'The Family' who are grateful that we continue to remember every two years the crew who lost their lives on the night of 12-13 July 1943 when the plane crashed on the Grammont mountain just above Le Bouveret. Particular welcome was given to Frank Abbott a nephew of Flt Lt Arthur Jepps. He promised to return with more members of his family for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2018.



Standard Bearers Graham Robertson and Alain Dardelin with Frank Abbott reading one of the prayers.

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## Long Ago and Far Away — a moment in time

*John Heptonstall*

To date, 'Roundel' has published two articles in which I have tried to give some account of the activities of the Royal Air Force Regiment back in the mid-1950s. The first concerned activities in Jordan during the Suez affair in 1956, and the latter the Cyprus Emergency of 1957-1959. This short article concerns a personal incident that took place during the Jordan period. It had no impact at all on the great affairs of nations that were in process at the time, but it did have a lasting effect on me. First, though, a note about the country in which the incident took place. The Kingdom of Jordan was created out of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1919, and was considered to be a British protectorate.

The RAF established a base at Amman in the 1920s, and a second airfield, RAF Mafraq, was under construction at the time of the incident. The Jordanian Army, called the Arab Legion, was recruited almost entirely from desert Bedouin tribesmen, proud of their traditions and fiercely loyal to the Hashemite Royal Family. The Legion was originally led by British officers, and was commanded by General Sir John Glubb, known as 'Glubb Pasha'. The deterioration of the political situation, however, eventually led His Majesty King Hussein to dismiss Sir John, who left Jordan just a few weeks before I arrived there in 1956.

If you read my earlier article you may remember that our early post-Suez days in Jordan were rather exciting, with 'Rockapes' sitting in the gun pits with armour-piercing shells in the guns, facing down a Syrian armoured Brigade. But this is a rather different story.

The excitement passed, and a long lull followed. After some months, things had calmed down to the point at which it became feasible to give a thought to all the material that had been left behind at RAF Amman, in our rather hasty removal to RAF Mafraq on Suez Day One. Someone suggested to the Group Captain that perhaps we should have a presence back there in Amman to keep an eye on the stuff. The equipment people said that they were far too busy, and wasn't this the sort of security thing that the Regiment were supposed to do?

The more junior of the two 19 Wing Squadron Leaders was told to select somebody for the job. The Middle Eastern Air Force (MEAF) was rather short of officers at the time: priority was always given to RAF units in West Germany. My unit, 29 Squadron, had an acting Squadron leader and four Pilot Officers, and I was the most senior of the four. The Squadron Leader decided that he could let me have a Land Rover, a driver, a Corporal, and six gunners. And that is how, at the tender age of 23 and as a Regiment Pilot Officer, I took command of a large and long-established RAF Station.

Things were rather quiet at first. It became known that we were planning to have local sales, though, and soon I had a string of visitors who wanted to state a prior interest, and usually to suggest that items might be grouped in certain ways before the auctions were held. Nobody actually tried to bribe me: there were suggestions about 'making a contribution to Mess funds' which I thought was a rather charming way of putting it (all relayed back through the proper channels, of course). Then came the day that very effectively relieved the boredom. A breathless corporal came into my office and said "Sir, there's a bunch of Arab Legion stealing furniture from No.2 hangar".



I collected two of my gunners, got into my Land Rover and drove to the hangar area, and there, sure enough, was an entire Company of Arab Legionaires with a fleet of trucks, happily removing Royal Air Force property in the shape of barrack furniture. A very smart Bedouin Captain was watching with approval.

I approached the Captain, saluted, and said "you cannot do this". He regarded me with surprise - and perhaps a little amusement - and said "Why can we not do this? These things are of no more use to you. You will shortly be leaving. But we need them". If there had been time to think, I would probably have come up with something about damaging Anglo-Jordanian diplomatic relations. But I had no time. The words that came out of my mouth were "Because I shall lose my Honour". The Captain's expression changed. He turned and shouted a few words of Arabic to his sergeant. The sergeant shouted at the troops. And the troops immediately started to carry the furniture back into the hangar.

A few years later I applied to the Harvard Business School for entry to their MBA Program. One part of the rather lengthy application form was "Write an account of some situation in which you had to exercise responsibility". I told them about the Captain. My application was accepted.

Whenever I hear someone making generalisations about Arabs or Muslims, I remember that day - and that Captain.

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## Geof Thomlinson remembers—part 2

*(When last we left our intrepid hero, Geof was scratching an existence at RAF Hemswell. Ed.)*

When the Squadron Leader had finished I felt compelled to ask permission to speak and admitted that it was my fault because I had rushed to the scene carrying the extinguisher. Squadron Leader Grant dismissed my appeal saying I was only an LAC but the Sergeant should have known better! I think he was docked a week's pay; rough justice! Another exciting event I witnessed from the office was when the pilot of Lincoln RF574 of No 83 Squadron, accidentally retracted the undercarriage when coming in to land, when he meant to control the flaps. No one was hurt, except the pilot, who suffered severe ribbing from his colleagues. Shortly after this, Lincoln WD131 from 199 squadron collided with a USAF F86D over Germany resulting in the death of the six-man crew. By this time I was a regular babysitter at the officers' married quarters. As a result of this tragedy four of the families I knew lost their father. The bodies were brought back to Hemswell and for two nights I shared the macabre vigil of guarding the morgue.

At the end of each training period the navigator was sent on a 'long-ranger' expedition. If the plane safely returned to base, then I suppose he was considered to have successfully passed the course. Each trip would last approximately a week and the destinations varied.

One day Squadron Leader Grant called me into his office and generously congratulated me on something or other I had done right, approved my promotion to Senior Aircraftsman and asked if I would like to go on one of the 'long-ranger' flights. Never having been inside an aircraft, never mind actually flown, I of course jumped at the opportunity. He offered me the chance to go on a flight to Nairobi or one going to Libya, Khartoum and Jordan. I plumped for the latter. He also offered the same opportunity to a young, junior engine mechanic.

One can imagine the excitement as we gathered on the tarmac under the wing of Lincoln SX977 for a briefing before leaving. The pilot Flight Lieutenant Matheson was a Scotsman from Inverness, with a large handlebar moustache; his engineer Flight-Sergeant Doug England and the navigator, also a Scot, was Pilot Officer Robertson. The first leg of the flight could hardly have been any shorter because we landed at Scampton, nine miles away down the A15. Here our luggage and the plane were searched by customs officials before we took off again and headed for Libya.

We landed at RAF Tripoli Idris airport before dusk. At that time Idris was little more than a staging post for flights to and from the Middle East. Doug England whisked the young engine mechanic and me into the city for a meal.



We all spent the next morning in the camp's swimming pool before setting out for Khartoum. It was the time of the Suez Crisis and Flight Lieutenant Matheson decided we should make a contribution, as our flight plan took us over Cairo.

I spent much of the trip in the co-pilot's seat and through the headphones he ordered me to collect all the hard boiled eggs from the packed lunches. Curious, I set off and found about twelve pigeon-sized eggs and returned to my seat and showed him my haul.

'When I give the word,' he said, 'drop them through the hatch'. I set off towards the small hatch located near the centre of the fuselage and opened the lid and waited.

'Are you ready?' he called.

'Ready Sir,' I replied.

'Ready, steady ... Fire!' I let the eggs go and we all cheered. 'That'll teach President Nasser a lesson,' shouted the pilot gleefully.

Flying on automatic-pilot at ten thousand feet over the desert, the monotonous drone of the four engines soon put Flt. Lt. Matheson to sleep. I wandered off to the nose and sat in the front turret, entranced by the patterns of the dunes below, seeking a glimpse of camels or Bedouin. Eventually I wandered back to my seat next to the pilot and gazed ahead. In the distance were mountains. They drew nearer. To me they looked much higher than we were flying. I began to worry. Drawing a deep breath, I eventually poked the pilot in the ribs and woke him.

'We seem to be heading towards some pretty high mountains,' I said.

'Bugger,' he replied. 'Robbie, where are you taking us?' he asked the navigator over the intercom. Pilot Officer Robertson came up from his table to look. He too swore and returned to fetch his chart. He checked the compass and checked his chart again.

'There are no mountains on our route,' he cried!

'Is it a bloody mirage then?' asked the captain. The mountains drew closer, Robbie at his table was panicking and talking gibberish into the intercom. Eventually the captain switched off the automatic pilot and we climbed to twelve thousand feet and skimmed over a range of rugged peaks. All the time our navigator was complaining that there are no mountains on the route.

'Well we'll just see where our heading takes us,' responded the dour captain.

We eventually arrived at Khartoum and a bewildered Robbie vowed to report that the charts he was given were incomplete or out of date!

The following morning I headed off into the city to find General Gordon's statue, which I duly photographed. The following year the Sudanese authorities removed the memorial and put it into storage. In recent years it was transported to England and now stands at Gordon Boy's School in Woking.



The next day we left Khartoum and headed for Amman in Jordan. Once again I was seated in the co-pilot's seat and as we drew near I was intrigued by the discussion between our captain and the air traffic controller. The conversation revolved around the length of the runway and the fact that no Lincoln, nor anything of its size, had ever landed there before. I watched as the sweat dripped off our commander's nose. The air traffic controller began his instructions, we dropped in height.

'You're still too high,' the voice responded. An argument ensued, ending with a laconic statement from the controller:

'You have just flown over the top of us.'

The captain did another circuit just to take a look at the runway. The expletives flew thick and fast.

'The bloody runway's too short. There's no way I can land this thing down there.' The engineer piped up on the intercom:

'You've no bloody choice! We're out of fuel!'

'I'll have the fire truck at the ready,' said the controller, providing us with much succour.

Accompanied by a fanfare of swearing our sweating captain lined up perfectly and bounced his way down the runway to stop just as the tarmac turned to sand - and we all cheered.

This leg took us back to Idris, where we spent the night before the final leg back to Scampton and the customs men. Flying over England I had taken myself off to the rear gunner's turret and was enjoying the patchwork of fields, as we came into land but the excitement was not over. Crossing over the boundary of the airfield perimeter, the rear wheel caught the top rail of the wooden fence and a great plank whistled past my ear.

What a memorable trip.

Shortly afterwards I was promoted to Corporal and posted down the road to Scampton. At that time the camp was closed with just a skeleton crew taking care of the administration. Three hundred Irish navies were occupying the billets and busy strengthening and lengthening the runways ready for the Vulcans. It was a time of terrible troubles with Ireland and we felt that we were sitting on a time bomb, surrounded, as we were, by all these tough, hard-drinking workmen. But that's another story.

After service with the RAF, Geoff trained to be a teacher, became a vice-principal in Bermuda and later served as Headmaster at schools in England, Indonesia, France and Switzerland. He has published three books: *Java Jaunt*, a tale of his time in Indonesia. *Pink Sand and Parasites*, a tale of intrigue set in Bermuda and his latest, a thriller: *Missing Genes*, set in Switzerland.

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**Oh, go on then! We are the Swiss Branch after all.**

*(Most of this courtesy of the BBC . Ed.).*

**Solar Impulse completes historic round-the-world trip.**

The first round-the-world solar powered flight has been completed, after the *Solar Impulse* aircraft touched down in Abu Dhabi. Bertrand Piccard piloted the plane for a final time, steering it safely from the Egyptian capital Cairo to the UAE.



Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg.

He has been taking turns at the controls with Swiss compatriot Andre Borschberg, with the mission aiming to promote renewable energy.

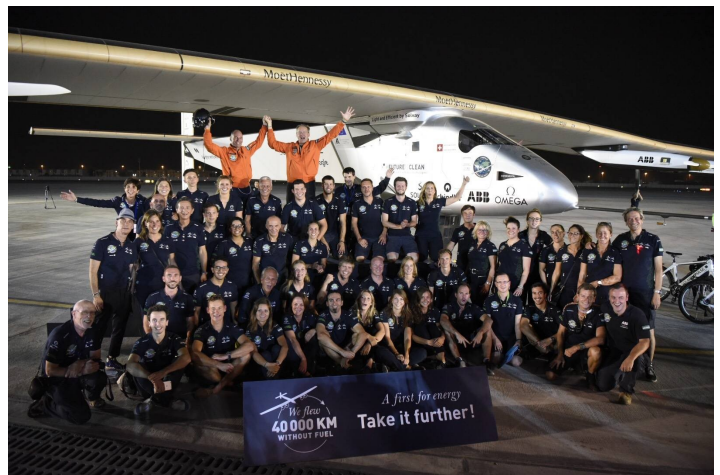
It brings to an end a voyage that began in Abu Dhabi on 9 March last year.

**The 17-stage journey covered some 42,000km, taking in four continents, three seas and two oceans.**

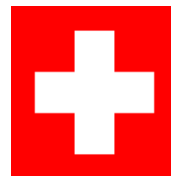
The longest leg, an 8,924km (5,545-mile) flight from Nagoya in Japan to Hawaii, US, lasted nearly 118 hours and saw Mr Borschberg break the absolute world record for longest (time duration) uninterrupted solo flight.

It was just one of **19 official aviation records** set during the global adventure.

Mr Piccard and Mr Borschberg have been working on the Solar Impulse project for more than a decade.



The whole *Solar Impulse* team in Abu Dhabi.



## THE SWISS BRANCH RESPITE BREAK FUND

The Swiss Branch of the Association was founded in 1951 to help provide comforts to a very large number of British and Allied ex-service men and women placed in clinics specializing in the treatment of tuberculosis.

After the last of the patients returned to the UK, a children's holiday scheme began, with three children from an RAF family spending several weeks on a Swiss farm. From this modest beginning, the scheme grew until as many as tens at a time of needy children of RAF families enjoyed a carefree holiday in the Swiss countryside.

It was later discovered that, often, parents and other children of the same family needed a holiday as much as the lucky child. This fact brought about a re-orientation of our holiday scheme.

From 1968, it was decided to offer financial help towards holidays for applicants at places of their choice in the UK. Several hundred serving RAF and former RAF personnel and their families have benefited from much needed respite breaks.

In 2016, the scheme continues to operate on a year-round basis and was recently renamed the **Swiss Branch Respite Break Fund**.

### HOW TO APPLY FOR A GRANT

- The local Branch HWO and applicant discuss the need.
- The local Branch HWO completes the detailed application form.
- The local Branch HWO forwards the case request to the Overseas Area Welfare Officer.

For further details, please contact the Swiss Branch HWO at the following address:

The Royal Air Forces Association  
PO Box 55  
CH - 1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Switzerland

Or contact us through the Swiss Branch Website <http://rafa-swissbranch.co.uk/> and follow the link on the Home Page

Note from our HWO: This is the flier we put out at the Annual Conference and to Area Welfare Officers in the UK to keep members informed about the scheme we operate and how it has been adapted to today. A reminder to our readers that the Swiss Branch is very much doing its bit.

#### The Team:

John Hannon (editor/layout), Régis Pizot ('court photographer'), Alain Dardelin (printing organiser), Nick Meyer and the Stuffers—but chiefly—all you contributors.

With grateful thanks to everybody.

#### List of Events in 2016

20 Aug	Plateau des Daines Commemoration
18 Sept	10.40 Battle of Britain 76th Commemoration, CWGC Cemetery, Vevey
23 Oct	10.30 78 Sqn. Halifax Commemoration, Montcony + Lunch
4-6 Nov	European Area Conference, Malta
5 Nov	Joint BRA/RAFA/RBL Lunch, Kongresshaus, Zurich
13 Nov	10.15 Remembrance Sunday, Parc Mon Repos, Geneva
11 Nov	10.40 Armistice Day, CWGC Cemetery, Vevey