



## The spirit of Glières – Vivre Libre ou Mourir

Alain L. Dardelin



A bright sunny sky welcomed five members of the RAFA Swiss branch at the National Necropolis of Morette on 26 March 2017 to attend the 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the Battles of Glières. This year's ceremony was placed under the presidency of General Vincent Pons, General Officer Commanding the 27<sup>ème</sup> Brigade d'Infanterie de Montagne (27<sup>ème</sup> BMI).



Mr. Pierre Lambert, the Prefect of Haute-Savoie, led the way, followed by local parliamentarians, civil, military and religious representatives to form line in front of the memorial. Among those present were General Bachelet, Colonel Vola, Mrs. Duby-Mueller (MP), Mr. Barrucand (Mayor of La Balme de Thuy), Mr. Jacques Douchet (Deputy Mayor of Thônes), Mr. Accoyer (Mayor of Annecy-le-Vieux), Mr. Monteil (Pdt Department Council), Mr. Tardy (MP).



A detachment of the 27<sup>ème</sup> Bataillon de Chasseurs Alpins (27<sup>ème</sup> BCA) commanded by Colonel Vola and its excellent band provided the smart guard of honour and

stirring music throughout the ceremony, while over 100 standards, representing veterans associations, formed up either side of the memorial. After some negotiation, John Hannon, carrying the Union Flag, placed himself in the first row where he was able to lower the Union Flag to the ground in salute when the "Aux Morts" was called.



In the opening speech, General Jean-René Bachelet, president of the Glières Association, recalled briefly the actions carried out by the *Résistance* and paid homage to the remaining 22 survivors out of the 465 *maquisards* present on 26 March 1944 on the plateau. Other speeches given by the representatives of the Israeli and Christian communities would follow before 105 schoolchildren from neighbouring communes would lay flowers on each of the graves as the names of the fallen were called out to the sound of the "Chants des Glières" ably played by the *fanfare* of the 27<sup>ème</sup> BCA. The children also joined the assembly in singing the popular Free French and French Resistance "Chant des Partisans".

Once wreaths had been laid by the various dignitaries and the one minute silence observed, the procession saluted the standards and made its way to the community centre of Thônes for a *vin d'honneur*. During the lunch which followed, General Bachelet introduced Mr. Gérard Métral, his successor to the presidency of the Association. More formal speeches were made in which recognition of the role the RAF played in dropping vital supplies to the *maquisards* was made. Our little team, consisting of John Hannon, Nick and Simone Meyer, Régis Pizot and myself, was personally made welcome and thanked for its participation in the ceremony.

## Les Glières postscript—and some detective work

John Hannon



We are always grateful for the invitation to attend this ceremony. At the lunch this year somebody raised the point about the RAF involvement. Who dropped supplies to the *maquisards* on the Plateau? General Bachelet admitted he did not know, and, at the time, neither did we. The Internet can be a marvellous place. Our thanks to Bob Body, who published an e-book '*Runways to Freedom*' about the shadowy units that plied back and forth to Europe at night, ferrying SOE agents and arms and supplies.

On the night of 5 March 1944 (sometime before the actual fighting on the Plateau), four Short *Stirlings* and two Handley Page *Halifaxes* from No 218 Squadron dropped a total of 105 containers. The operation name was 'JOHN 69'. The aircraft operated out of Tempsford, Lakenheath and Tuddenham. No 218 Squadron was temporarily attached to the two 'special duties' squadrons, No 138 and No 161, operating out of Tempsford, of which more in future *Roundels*.

Happily, all of the six aircraft returned safely. All dropped their containers. The aircraft were in the air for approximately seven and a half hours. The aircraft were over the target area between 23.59 hours on 5 March 1944 to 01.14 hours on 6 March 1944.



## Joint BRA/RBL/RAFA Lunch – 05 November 2016 – Kongresshaus, Zurich

Jonathan Pitt

Over 35 members and guests travelled from far and wide, some braving torrential rain, to attend the traditional annual Joint BRA/RBL/RAFA Lunch at the *Kongresshaus*, Zurich, on 5 November 2016. The lunch is held each year not only for the pleasure of a fine meal in good company but, also to pay tribute to the work past and present of British and Commonwealth Armed Forces. Graham Robertson, Chairman of the British Residents' Association of Switzerland (BRA), formally welcomed those attending the lunch, followed by short speeches from Jonathan Elzingre, Chairman of the Royal

British Legion (RBL) in Switzerland and Jonathan Pitt, the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) East Switzerland Liaison. Both outlined the wonderful work that these organisations undertake in providing welfare and support for serving and retired Service men and women, veterans, and their families in almost every aspect of their daily lives.

The guest of honour and speaker for this year was Major André Comps, a full time officer with the Swiss Army Peacekeeping Mission, who explained with a most enlightening presentation, the scope and variety of his remit. Those who were present learnt about the size and presence of the Swiss Army in Peacekeeping Missions, both in comparative and actual size around the world. Not only was Major Comps knowledgeable with regard to the content of his presentation, but he had an excellent manner and presence in both presenting and during the answer and question session that followed.

Having flown in to Zurich from the UK, Sally Ramsay Patrick gave a wonderful update on the work she undertakes with the charity *Skiing with Heroes*, which is incorporated into the UK-based charity, *Supporting Wounded Veterans*, Website:

[www.supportingwoundedveterans.com](http://www.supportingwoundedveterans.com)

The charity supports wounded ex-Iraq and Afghanistan campaign ex-soldiers through a specially designed ski-based development, mentoring and job-finding programme. It was fantastic to hear her story of participation in an expedition to the highest mountain in South America, Aconcagua, with a group of ex-military personnel being assisted by the charity.

Not only did the *Kongresshaus* provided those attending with a superbly cooked and presented meal, but the care and attention of the service staff was excellent. All of which provided for a superb lunch event, enjoyed and commented on by many of those present. Many thanks to Joanna Koch and her team, for the organisation and execution of this excellent event. The date for the next Joint Lunch is 28 October 2017. See you there!

## ANZAC Day service Thursday 25 April 2017

John Hannon

This year the capes worked and those attending this memorial service were spared rain as Piper Drew Meek played in the four Standard Bearers (John Hannon—



Union Flag, Shaun Choon—Australian Flag, Mike Bilo-deau—New Zealand Flag, Alain Dardelin—RAFA Standard), to take their usual station punctually behind the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery Cross at St. Martin's Cemetery, Vevey.

All present were welcomed by the Australian Consul-General, Suzanne Stein and the opening prayer was offered by Rev Clive Atkinson.



The Commemoration Address was given by the Australian Consul-General and all then sang the hymn, *Abide with Me*, which was then followed by the Prayers of Intercession. When these were concluded, the Turkish Consul-General, H. Barbaros Dicle delivered a moving address of reconciliation.

There then followed the laying of wreaths. Wreaths were laid by the Australian Permanent Mission and Consulate-General, the New Zealand Permanent Mission and Consulate-General, the British Embassy, the Turkish Permanent Mission and Consulate-General, the Permanent Mission of South Africa, a joint wreath was laid by representatives of the Royal Air Forces Association, the Royal British Legion and the Royal Naval Association. Further wreaths were laid by the British Residents' Association, the Federation of Anglo-Swiss Clubs and the Royal Overseas League.

Once the official wreaths had been laid, individuals were invited to lay their floral tributes if they wished.

There then followed a poetry reading by Aisha Wood Amin of *In Flanders Fields*, by John McCrae.

All then sang the hymn *O God Our Help In Ages Past* and heard the Remembrance Address delivered by the New Zealand Consul-General and Ambassador to the United Nations, Jillian Dempster.

The Ode *They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old*; was recited by the Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative, Australian Permanent Mission and Consulate-General, Vanessa Wood.

The *Last Post* was then sounded by our bugler, Peter Fairgrieve, prior to the Two Minutes Silence followed by the *Reveille*.

The national anthems of Australia and New Zealand were then played by Piper Drew Meek. The Rev Clive Atkinson offered the Closing Prayer. Suzanne Stein gave the Farewell Address and the piper then played and led the Standard Bearers off.

There are fourteen Australian and New Zealand servicemen buried at Vevey.

Refreshments were served afterwards in the form of traditional ANZAC biscuits accompanied by very welcome antipodean beverages.



#### List of Events for 2017

|                 |       |   |
|-----------------|-------|---|
| 8 May (TBC)     | 11.00 | Valleiry, France  |
| 11 May          | 10.00 | European Area Conference, Yarnfield Park Training & Conference Centre, Yarnfield, Stone, Staffs, UK |
| 11-13 May       |       | RAFA Annual Conference, Yarnfield Park, Yarnfield, Stone, Staffs, UK                                |
| 3 June          |       | RAFA -RBL Joint Summer Lunch, Yvoire, France  |
| 17 June (TBC)   |       | Plateau Glières, France   |
| 18/19 Aug (TBC) |       | Plateau des Daines Commemoration, France  |
| 17 Sept         | 10.40 | Battle of Britain 77 <sup>th</sup> Commemoration, CWGC Cemetery, Vevey, Switzerland                 |
| 6-8 Oct         |       | European Area Conference, Dublin, Republic of Ireland   |
| 22 Oct          | 10.30 | 78 Sqn. Halifax Commemoration + Lunch, Montcony, France   |
| 28 Oct          |       | Joint BRA/RAFA/RBL Lunch, Zurich, Switzerland   |
| 11 Nov          | 10.40 | Armistice Day, CWGC Cemetery, Vevey, Switzerland  |

NB: TBC means that the date and time of an event are "to be confirmed"

Your Committee looks forward to welcoming many Members to each event. Watch for details in Roundel, by special circulation, or on the Web site

<http://rafa-swissbranch.co.uk/>

Don't hesitate to ask a Committee Member for information



## La Chapelle-Thecle Commemoration, 23 April 2017

John Hannon

The hamlet of *Le Petit Bordey* in the sleek and lush Burgundy countryside was spared rain this year and the weather was crisp and clear – and above all dry underfoot. No call for tractors (or capes) this year! We were delighted to welcome Betty Bascombe and her family back.

Despite the spring sunshine we counted fewer Standard Bearers from the French associations, although the usual Lyon RAFA/RBL stalwarts were there with us. We put down the sparse numbers of children to the school holidays, but our impression was that more members of the general public were present.

While the *Sous-Préfète* was unable to attend due to election duties, we were honoured by the presence of the *Maire of La Chapelle-Thecle*, M. Chaillot and the National Assembly *Députée* Cécile Untermaier.



M. Robert Fichet, 'Bob' to give him his wartime cover-name in the *Résistance*, leant his quiet, if now frail, dignity to the proceedings.

The *Fanfare de Louhans* did their usual sterling work and all present were invited to the *vin d'honneur* at the *salle communale* in *La Chapelle-Thecle*, where Betty was presented with a copy of the new metal sign at the entrance to *Le Petit Bordey* advertising the presence of the Lancaster crash site in the hamlet.



Betty, who was well enough to travel this year, celebrated her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday the following Sunday and we counted ourselves fortunate to be able to make a fuss of her and sing *Happy Birthday*, in her honour, followed by three hearty cheers, at the traditional lunch at the *Cheval Rouge*.

We took our leave of Betty, her daughters, Sandra and Gaynor and Gaynor's husband Ian Mackay after the lunch, but not before we observed Betty sloping off indefatigably to the florists to buy the tributes for her next port of call in Lyon, where these would adorn the graves of her first husband and his comrades.

A most remarkable lady, faithfully assisted by her family in what can only be described as an impressive logistical effort. Each time we are privileged to welcome the Bascombes and Mackays we count ourselves very lucky indeed.



### Obituary notice

We regret to announce that the following Branch Member died recently:

*Desmond George* , Founex nr. Geneva, January 2017



## Our January brunch at the Crowne Plaza Hotel



Di Robertson, Margaret Duff, Bryan Pattison and Alain Dardelin

Pauline Nicholls, Brita Baker, and Eric Schaerer



Graham Robertson, Sonia Heptonstall and Sylvia Smouha



Rosemary Billinge and Stefan Bowen



Jane Pizot, Simone Meyer and Nick Meyer



## STOP PRESS: Thanks ‘Brits in Business’!

What for? Well, on 6 April last, Alan Baker, Alain Dardelin and Graham Robertson attended a ‘Brits in Business’ evening function hosted by the UK Mission in Geneva. In Alan Baker’s own words on 7 April:

“Alain, Graham & I shared in yesterday evening’s ‘Beyond the Invictus Games’ presentation, arranged by Ambassador Julian Braithwaite and his Officers, financially supported by Barclays Bank and ‘Brits in Business’.

**Following the presentation, the Vice-Chairman of RBL and yours truly were called forward and each was presented with a donation of CHF 1,000 by “Brits in Business”.** This magnificent recognition of the work of RAFA in carrying out our prime function of “Help & Helping” was witnessed by a large audience of bankers, diplomats and other professionals. The donation will be banked in RAFA-Swiss Branch’s Geneva account.



Neil’s target this summer, for the second time.

No words of appreciation could be expressed at the time, as the presentation had over-run and many guests had needed to stand for up to one hour. Nevertheless, I was able to express our appreciation to the Ambassador, the Donor and others closely linked to the event.”



Having had both his legs blown-off above the knee, Neil Heritage still helped row across the Atlantic **and will attempt to climb to the Matterhorn’s summit this sum-**



Neil Heritage, the British Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Julian Braithwaite and Edward Janvrin, who presented on behalf of *Row2Recovery*, which is currently plotting another attempt to row across the Atlantic.

**mer** (He nearly did so in 2016). His story should in itself offer our readers an insight into the achievements of injured Service personnel determined to live their lives to the full.

Last year Neil Heritage attempted to be the first double above the knee amputee to ever summit the Matterhorn. Sadly he did not complete the climb and is going to put the record straight and reattempt the climb in August 2017.

Neil is an inspiring individual to all he meets and has already gone against everything the doctors said he would be able to achieve when he was first injured. He now walks unaided on prosthetic limbs and was part of a six man team, all of whom were injured while serving in the British Army, to row unassisted across the Atlantic in 2011.

Neil strives to prove that there is life beyond injury, to help those with similar injuries. He works closely with other injured service men and women and sets out to inspire them by proving that literally anything is possible, hence his attempts to climb the Matterhorn!

His last attempt at climbing the Matterhorn was funded by the Endeavour Fund but this year he will be raising the money himself. He has already raised £5,000 himself and requires another £9,600 to fund the expedition.

*Ed.: Content courtesy of BBC.COM and JustGiving.*

### The Team:

John Hannon (editor/layout), Régis Pizot (‘court photographer’), Alain Dardelin (printing organiser), Nick and Simone Meyer and the Staffers—but chiefly—all you contributors. With thanks to everybody.