



ROYAL AIR FORCES Association
The charity that supports the RAF family

ROUNDEL



August 2019

The Swiss Branch Newsletter



Attending the 75th anniversary of D-Day celebrations

Eric Schaerer

The 75th anniversary of D-Day and the battle for Normandy had a special significance this year, as it is generally believed that it might be the last commemoration of such magnitude as surviving veterans of that famous June 6, 1944 are all in their nineties.

From June 1st to June 9th, hundreds of events took place all over Normandy. Omaha, Utah, Gold, Juno and Sword beaches have become household names. Huge delegations came from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and France. Smaller groups from most of the allied countries were there as well. There was extensive TV coverage of the

official ceremonies in England and France with HM the Queen, Presidents, Prime Ministers and high ranking military officers all present.

Two members of the RAFA Swiss branch were there, John WEBB and Eric SCHAERER, who were fortunate enough to



have been invited to join the Association Nationale Franco-Britannique (ANFB) in liaison with the 3rd Parachute Brigade and the 6th Airborne Division Memorial Association. On the night of June 5 to 6, 1944, the 6th Airborne paratroopers, having landed in gliders behind German lines, took the famous Pegasus Bridge in Ranville-Bénouville, until relieved the next day by the commandos of Major Lovat and his famous piper. (That story is well told in the film *The Longest Day*). There is a very informative Memorial Museum Pegasus near the bridge, but the famous 'bistro' on the other side of the bridge claims to be the first café liberated on June 6 in Normandy. The walls are covered with old photographs and mementos of various regiments (and they have their own red wine bottles and label).



People mainly remember D-Day, but the battle for Normandy lasted well until mid-September and was bitterly fought in the *bocage normand* countryside. Allied forces deployed 2,052,000 men in *Operation Overlord* and lost 37,000 men and 163,000 injured. On the German side, the toll was even heavier with 80,000 killed, 170,000 injured and

200,000 made prisoners. In these crucial months 36 of the 40 German divisions engaged were disabled. But let us not forget the civilian population. Due to the heavy German resistance in Caen, the allies decided to bomb the city and in two raids about 11,000 civilians were killed.

Other cities like Le Havre and Saint-Lô were left in ruins. It is estimated that overall 20,000 French civilians were killed in Normandy.

We attended numerous memorial services of the various airborne divisions. Visiting the main British military cemeteries, immaculately kept by the British War Graves Commission, one notices



immediately on the tombstones the young age of many of the soldiers killed. Very emotional ceremonies in Ranville,



the second largest British cemetery (after Bayeux) with 2,564 graves and in Banneville, where 500 schoolchildren waving British flags lined the path leading to the cemetery and deposited a rose on each grave (over 2,000). These two ceremonies in particular left a lasting impression on us.

We were restricted as to what we could do as there were many local travel restrictions and road closures due to the various events taking place, but we did manage to see C-47s (*Dakotas*) dropping their sticks of paratroopers in vintage uniforms and we managed to sneak in to Quistreham to visit the big bunker the Germans built as an observation strongpoint with its range-finder, which provided a panoramic view over the Channel in a 25 miles radius.



If you wish to visit the Normandy beaches, one should choose a quieter time than June. But John and I will never forget the 75th D-Day celebrations.

75th Anniversary of D-Day - a Profile.

Ben Holt

The 75th anniversary of the opening of the Second Front on the morning of 6th June 1944 brought to mind an article I wrote on one of our Members on the 60th anniversary: Col. Beverley H. Holloway OBE, ERD, TD, DL. He was a very modest man and I had a certain difficulty prizing details out of him for this profile!

Bev Holloway, as he preferred to be known, was an engineer by profession and 1939 found him in charge of the construction of an extensive new R.A.F. hospital and maintenance unit at Wroughton near Swindon. His family building and civil engineering company was better known though for contracts such as the Bank of England, the Old Bailey and several bridges over the Thames and four bridges over the Tigris and Euphrates, to name but a few. On the outbreak of war he volunteered to join The Parachute Royal Engineers and 'landed' in the 6th Airborne Division, destined to invade Nazi Europe. I will let him tell the tale:

"What may have been forgotten in these days of enormous air-power and precision weapons is that an amphibious landing was a very dangerous undertaking; especially as Hitler had given orders for the whole coastline to be heavily fortified and all paratroops to be shot on sight. What our amphibious force most feared was the enemy bringing up armour and artillery before we could land our own. The answer was to protect the flanks of our invasion "Armada" the night before the sea-borne landings. This was done on the right (1st U.S. Army flank) by 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and on the left (2nd British Army flank) by 6th Airborne Division. The latter consisted of two Parachute Brigades (us) and one Glider Brigade. Remember, there were no helicopters in those days!

"On the night of the 5th June I was in command of a 'stick' (a *Dakota* planeload) of Parachute Engineers with orders to demolish two bridges over the River Dives by 06:00 hrs. This was to deny enemy tanks and

transport access to the high ground between Caen and the beaches. [Incidentally, the River Dives was where William the Conqueror built his ships for the invasion of England in 1066.]

"Although my stick was due to be practically the first to drop, our *Dakota* circled over England with hundreds of others for 1 ½ hours to get in line for a sustained drop on the Normandy DZs (Dropping Zones). Even with modern Air Traffic Control equipment it would have been something of a nightmare. Well done the R.A.F!

"At approximately 00:55 hrs on 6th June, I was standing in the door of *Dakota* 279, waiting with my stick for the Red Light then the Green Light – "Go". Fortunately I was held tightly by the R.A.F. Dispatcher because No.1 with all his equipment had only one hand available: the

rear of the stick ran more or less straight out.

"I say I was lucky because the aircraft ran into heavy anti-aircraft fire on the coastline. The pilot took quick evasive action climbing and swerving but throwing more than half the stick onto the deck. Despite two years of meticulous

training and being at their best physically, they were unable to get up unaided so heavily laden were they with arms and explosives. Where were we? By now I had visions of the two panzer divisions in the area crossing our un-demolished bridge at Robehomme!

"Once again the R.A.F. to the rescue – the shortest Red Light I have ever seen turned to Green and I was in the air. By the light of the anti-aircraft fire I saw Varaville Church which I knew from air photos was only a few hundred yards from our DZ. The whole stick seemed to be in the air – and actually were! Moving to Robehomme bridge, which was the most important, we managed to avoid two enemy patrols by going to ground, since our job was not to kill a few enemy but to delay the tanks. This is called "Maintenance of the Objective" in the army and can easily be forgotten in the heat of action. We destroyed both bridges. So far so good, but then we were pinned down and stalked by



the enemy for two days before we could slip through the lines towards the Bridgehead. We then took over some slit trenches to defend the Mesnil crossroads under mortar and shell-fire and infantry attack - just a 100 yards from the new memorial which the Prince of Wales unveiled at this year's commemoration. It was not until end August that we reached the Seine and were able to return to England to prepare for operations further north. I was transferred to 6th Airborne HQ as Intelligence Officer Royal Engineers, responsible for planning future operations – most interesting. There followed the Ardennes at Christmas '44, the Rhine crossing at Wesel by glider and the advance through Northern Germany to “meet” the Soviet Army at Wismar on the Baltic. “

Appel du 18 juin 1940 – Years 80 - 1

Alain L. Dardelin



In 1940, General de Gaulle had set up the headquarters of the Free French Forces at No 4 Carlton Gardens in the St. James's district of the City of Westminster and it is very likely that he finalised the text of his famous Appeal there. The first broadcast was aired on 18 June 1940 on *Radio Londres* hosted by the BBC and was somehow not recorded. The speech as we hear it today was recorded and broadcast on 22 June 1940.

Seventy-nine years later, on Tuesday 18 June, the commemorative ceremony presided by Mr. Pierre Lambert, *Préfet de Haute-Savoie* took place on the Plateau des Glières in the presence of a platoon of 45 soldiers from the 68th African Artillery Regiment based in La Valbonne near Lyon as guard of honour and the marching band of the *27ème Bataillon de Chasseurs Alpains*.

Military and public authorities, representatives of neighbouring communes, representatives of veterans' associations and school students were in attendance. Seventy-seven flag bearers stood on two rows on either side of the commemorative stele where the text of the Appeal is displayed. Unfortunately, our friend John

Hannon was not able to attend, so as sole representative of the Swiss branch, I had the honour to carry the Union Flag once again.



Following the order of ceremony, speeches were delivered by Mr. Lambert and Mr. Gérard Métral, President of the *Association des Glières*, then two students took it in turn to read the Appeal and the band played the *Chant des Partisans*. One minute silence was observed followed by the French national anthem before officials laid wreaths of fresh flowers thus concluding this year's ceremony.

The *Chasseurs Alpains* led the way to the marquee for the welcome glass of water (yes!) followed by the traditional *vin d'honneur* and nibbles.

The Team:

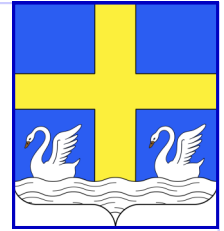
Editor, John Hannon, roving reporter, Alain Dardelin, photographers, Régis Pizot, Robbin Davies and Simone Meyer, contributing reporters and lifesavers, Alan Baker, Eric Schaefer, Ben Holt, Margaret Duff and Anne and John Spicer.

We regret to announce the passing of the following Members:

Nil

We are pleased to welcome the following new Member:

Bryan Clark; welcome Bryan.



SUMMER LUNCH – YVOIRE – 1 JUNE 2019.

Alan Baker

By popular request, our annual summer lunch, shared with Royal British Legion Switzerland Members, returned to the pretty Hotel du Port, in Yvoire (F) on Saturday 1 June. Our prayers were again answered, the day staying hot and sunny. All 39 participants were able to enjoy a Welcome Aperitif, generously offered by the Hotel, on the lakeside, followed by a lunch that inevitably – as we were in Yvoire – included as many *Filets de Perche Frits* as anyone’s appetite allowed.

This social gathering enabled friendships to be made or renewed, guests coming from a wide area of Switzerland and neighbouring parts of France. After thanking Luis and his efficient team for again providing us with a high standard of service, everyone applauded one of our group, a veteran of National Service, upon having signed-up (*or was he pressganged...?*) as a new Member of RAFA – Swiss Branch.

Shall we return again to Yvoire in 2020 or select a new destination? Thoughts to the Editor, please.



Royal Air Forces Association Swiss Branch



List of events 2019

15 September	Battle of Britain Commemoration and Lunch, Vevey, Switzerland
20 October	No 78 Sqn Halifax Commemoration, Montcony, France
25-27 October	European Area Autumn Conference, Best Western Hotel, Chavannes de Bogis, Switzerland
10 November	Remembrance Sunday, Parc Mon Repos
11 November	Armistice Day (Monday), CWG Cemetery, Vevey
7 March 2020	Branch AGM (Saturday) Crowne Plaza

La Chapelle-Thécle, 75th Anniversary Commemoration, 27 April 2019

Anne and John Spicer

During the preceding afternoon, we had driven through heavy rain, hailstones and bright sunshine to our overnight stop in Louhans. The morning for commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Lancaster crash in the hamlet of *Le Petit Bordey* proved to be no different. It was very wet underfoot in the lane and in the farmyard. The rain did manage to hold off whilst the ceremony took place, so umbrellas were not needed. This was fortunate as the wind was extremely blustery and chilled us to the bone. The task of the 10 Standard Bearers was made even more difficult as they battled the wind either blowing straight into their faces or the next second from behind them. A special thanks to Alan Baker for stepping into the breach to be our Union Flag Bearer on this occasion, ably supported by Pierre Biard of the Lyon Branch bearing the RAFA Standard.



Despite the weather, a large number of villagers of all ages were present at the wreath-laying ceremony. As usual, the marching band of the *Clique de Sapeurs Pompiers de Louhans*, supported by others from the village, were on parade honouring the sterling work their compatriots had performed after the Lancaster crashed with its bombs still on board.

Words of welcome were given by the Mayor of La Chapelle Thécle, M. Alain Chaillet. Bryan Pattison, during his address, spoke of Betty Bascombe, who had sadly died in 2018. Betty had been married to Sgt Ronald Jones for only 3 months when he was lost in the crash at Le Petit Bordey on 24 April 1944. Betty's family, who had regularly made the journey from the UK with her to take part in the commemoration, could not be present on this occasion as they were attending a special memorial service for Betty in the UK.

Margaret Duff laid a potted rose plant and also a single red rose beside the memorial to acknowledge Betty's tradition of laying a single rose both at this monument and beside her husband's grave in Lyon. The *Sous-Préfète* for Louhans, Mme Pascaline Boulay, laid a wreath, followed by similar action by several regional officials. We were pleased that Robert Fichet, 'Bob' to give him his wartime cover name in the Résistance, and despite the frailty of his advancing years, still



played his own active role in this wreath-laying ceremony.

The British National Anthem and *La Marseillaise* were then sung, beautifully led by a bilingual lady who luckily happened to be standing next to us and so shared her copy of the lyrics of the second verse of the National Anthem. To my shame, I was unable to join her in singing it without them as I couldn't remember the words!

The Mayor of La Chapelle Thécle then invited those assembled to the traditional *vin d'honneur* in the *salle communale* in La Chapelle Thécle. There we were able to catch up with old friends and make some new ones.



The numbers able to attend from the RAFA Swiss and Lyon Branches were unfortunately reduced this year due to illness, accidents and other commitments. All the same, 9 of us were able to enjoy what has now become the traditional regional lunch held at *L'Hostellerie du Cheval Rouge* in Louhans before heading home-wards to France or Switzerland.