

ROUNDEL

The SWISS BRANCH Newsletter

December 2016




Montcony 25 October 2016

Unlike last year, when the warm sun made not only the autumn foliage look its best but helped in drawing another large crowd to the tiny village of Montcony in Burgundy, to share in the annual commemoration of 78 Squadron Halifax II W1018's loss, the weather was distinctly cooler this October. Montcony is always our busiest commemoration, deeply intertwined with the homage paid by our French friends. Wreaths are laid always in the same order: schoolhouse, churchyard, crash site memorial and the village's own war memorial.

The well-ordered parade formed up punctually at 11.00, at the old schoolhouse courtyard for the traditional rendering of respect to "*Capitaine Vic*" and his fellow *Résistance* fighters. Some 18 Swiss and Lyon



With punctilious courtesy our French friends placed our three Standards (Lyons branch, Swiss branch and Union Flag) at the front of the parade

Branch members with 30 French standard bearers and their three British counterparts were in attendance. The RAFA Swiss and Lyons Branch Standards were

proudly borne by Alain Dardelin and Pierre Biard, with John Hannon carrying the Union Flag. These Standards were granted pride of place in the procession as it then marched up to the village churchyard's crew graves, thence to the crash site me-



memorial stone and finally on to the French war memorial. Our Branch member Ian Ferguson kindly laid a wreath on the immaculately groomed graves, whilst our Chairman Bryan Pattison laid one at the crash site memorial, alongside five others laid by the *Sous-Préfète de Louhans* Mrs Véronique Beuve (represented), and other dignitaries. In addition, the nephew of Sgt Chambers laid a small wooden cross on his uncle's grave.

A perfect day ended with the traditionally superb meal (13 Swiss and Lyons branch members attending) laid on in the village hall by a lady caterer working from home ably assisted by ladies of the village and a drive home through the winter dark for those of us negotiating the Jura and its winding roads.

John Hannon and Alain Dardelin



Plateau des Daines, 20 August 2016

"When Passing through the Daines, remember the courage of the Resistance...." is a rough translation of the first line on the memorial set on a remote hillside on the Plateau des Daines.



We British should remember them because these were people of the *Alliance Network* who ran an escape line as far as the Spanish border to help downed airmen return to the UK. The *Marksman Network* was heavily involved in providing intelligence around the time of D-Day. The Resistance forces on

the Daines also worked with the RAF "*Moonlight*" Squadrons who supplied the S.O.E and French Resistance in Haute-Savoie. The Resistance here paid a heavy price in casualties including Charles Blanc, who was executed after being betrayed when taking escaped airmen to Perpignan, and his wife, Laurence Blanc, who survived imprisonment in a concentration camp to return home and raise her family.



The RAFA contingent (John Hannon, Alain Dardelin and Graham Robertson) with Jonathan Elzingre and David McGeorge from RBL along with André Blanc (centre).

So why is the memorial in this remote place? Simply because that was where the Blanc family lived and its home was the local HQ of the Resistance. *Souvenir Français* (SF) for the district of Frangy is now run by their secretary and acting president André Blanc. Over the years, RAFA Swiss Branch, mainly through Alain Dardelin,

has built up a close relationship with SF. This year again, along with representatives from RBL, we participated in the small ceremony of commemoration. This year for a change the weather was wet and cloudy. This allowed Alain Dardelin and John Hannon to don their new rain capes while showing off their skills with the Standards.

Graham Robertson put on his (now venerable) beret to lay the wreath and Di Robertson aimed to reach Régis Pizot's level of professionalism with a camera. After André Blanc's introduction, a retired General from the *Chasseurs Alpains* paid tribute to the courage and skill of the RAF squadrons who supplied the Resistance. Wreaths were laid, followed by a minute's silence. Then we all congratulated the standard-bearers, who ranged from old to a young lad, proud to be on his third outing carrying a flag for SF.



The day was not all sombre. After the ceremony, there was a chance to talk to the French who had attended and to meet old friends. Unlike John Hannon, who was on a diet, the rest of us went on to an enjoyable and very full meal in a local restaurant.

Graham Robertson

2016 - Commemoration of the 72nd anniversary of the Liberation of Haute-Savoie

In the four days leading to the liberation of Annecy and the department of Haute-Savoie on 19 August 1944, the Resistance launched a series of acts of sabotage in towns dotted around the French side of Lake Geneva with the intention of isolating German garrisons. All means of communications - telephone lines, roads, railway tracks - were destroyed and rendered useless.

On 16 August, the joint and simultaneous actions of the Resistance and men of the *Armée Secrète* (AS), *Francs-tireurs et partisans* (FTP) led to the liberation of Evian, Saint-Julien-en-Genevois, Viry, Valleiry, and other villages of the canton.

However, in retaliation, German forces stationed in the Ain department crossed the *Pont Carnot* near Collonges-Fort L'Ecluse setting fire to the towns of Valleiry, Viry, Chevrier and Vulbens, executing tens of inhabitants. But, in an ultimate counter-attack the Resistance forces

forced the Germans back across the bridge on 17 August. The Saint-Julien-en-Genevois canton was then free from German occupation.

Two days later, commandant Joseph Lambroschini, alias Nizier, of the *Forces françaises de l'intérieur* (FFI) organized a meeting at Annecy with Colonel Meyer the local Wehrmacht commander to negotiate the terms and conditions of surrender of the German troops. The signing of the act meant the liberation of Annecy and the Haute-Savoie.

16 August 2016 – Unexpectedly, RAFA Swiss branch was invited at short notice to participate in the commemorative ceremonies of the 72nd anniversary of the Liberation of the Haute-Savoie held in several towns including Saint-Julien-en-Genevois and Valleiry.

Although being a very French homage to the Resistance, local authorities and *Souvenir Français* local delegations felt it appropriate to have a British presence at the two venues in recognition of the aerial support many crews of the Royal Air Force provided to the local Resistance.

In their speeches the two mayors: Mr. Antoine Viel-liard of Saint-Julien and Mr. Frédéric Mugnier of Valleiry extended a warm welcome and expressed their thanks to the Royal Air Force through the two representatives of RAFA: John Hannon and Alain Dardelin carrying the Union flag and the RAFA Standard.

Alain L. Dardelin



Our two Standard Bearers at Valleiry with Mme Elisabeth Blandin taking advantage of the shade that hot summer's morning. No need for rain capes that time.

The Team:

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

Battle of Britain Commemoration

A couple of dozen hardy folk braved the elements on Battle of Britain Sunday to commemorate the Battle's 76th anniversary at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery, Vevey,

The Branch Chaplain, Roy Damary, led the Service but his address was curtailed as the rain proceeded to destroy his paperwork! Various people took an active part in the Service by reading some of the prayers.

Wreaths were laid by Suzanne Stein, Consul General for Australia, Carl Reaich, Consul General for New Zealand, a Swiss Army Major (name withheld by request) representing the Swiss Military, and the Branch

Chairman. The Union Flag and Branch Standard were carried by John Hannon and Alain Dardelin respectively, resplendent in their RAF Association Standard Bearers' rain capes, and they were joined by the RBL Swiss Branch Standard Bearer, David McGeorge. The Last Post and Reveille were played by our Branch Bugler, Peter Fairgrieve.

Numbers were down this year due to unavoidable absences and illnesses.

Despite getting wet, 13 sat down to the traditional 'filets de perche' down by the lake, but inside for a change!

Bryan Pattison

Armistice Day



Despite the early morning rain (one person encountered sleet on the *auto-route*), the weather held up for the Ceremony itself and some 80 people attended. Some 20 wreaths were laid by representatives of the UK and Commonwealth Embassies as well as local organisations including RAFA, RBL, RNA and schools. The Union Flag and RAFA Standard were paraded by our faithful Standard Bearers John Hannon and Alain Dardelin respectively with the RBL Standard carried on this occasion by Zachary Boaron.

The British Embassy kindly hosted a *vin d'honneur* in a local hotel afterwards. (Photos overleaf).



Standards at the 'dip' during the Commemoration Service led by Canon Adele Kelham, the Rev. Clive Atkinson and HE David Moran, the UK Ambassador to Switzerland.



Jason Williams prepares to lay the RNA's wreath. Nick Meyer and Bryan Pattison wait their turn to pay homage to the memory of the dead on this day.



Swiss memorial day - Parc Mon Repos – 13 November 2016

Sunday 13th November 1921 the first "Cérémonie de Mon-Repos" was organised by the committee which commissioned the sculpture of the memorial by genevese Albert Carl Angst. Four flags and 60 people reportedly attended the event. Fortunately, eighty-five years later

attendance has changed for the better. On the day, the city of Geneva observes the end of the first global conflict of the 20th century and remembers the citizens and soldiers from Geneva who died in the service of their country. It is also a time to pause and honour the dead of



UK Standard Bearers and veterans making a fair fist of marching in step—until the band changed beat again. We deliberately did not keep track of how many times the *Cadets de Genève* changed beat.

so many other conflicts and acts of terrorism in the world since 1918. This year, the ceremony took place on Sunday 13th November. As is customary, the parade formed up casually in the front of the Kempinski Hotel before gaining positions as instructed by this year's army parade coordinator Major Fabrice Pervangher. It was 10.50 when the parade, led by a contingent of *Gendarmes*, moved off to the beat of the drums of the *Cadets de Genève* and the music of the *Corps de Musique de Landwehr* towards the memorial in the *Parc Mon Repos*.

Behind the lead group were over twenty military and civilian associations in different colour uniforms carrying their respective banners and flags. Our small delegation of three members of RAFA Swiss branch accompanied with five RBL members, had John Hannon carrying the Union flag, Alain Dardelin the RAFA Swiss branch Standard and David MacGeorge the RBL Standard. On entering the Parc's grounds, the drum beat became more marked, the "*Aux Armes, Genève*" march resounded and we marched standards dipped to the horizontal and "eyes left" as we passed the saluting base. Once in place on the platform in front of the memorial where wreaths had been placed, the President of the ceremony, Capt Guillaume Genoud announced the order of ceremony and invited the audience to sing the first verse of the anthem of the Republic and Canton of Geneva "*Cé qu'è lainô*". Guest speaker, Lt Gen Aldo C. Schellenberg, Commander of the Swiss Air Force, addressed the authorities and audience. In

his speech he also paid homage to the three pilots who had died in two different crashes two months apart. Following the keynote speech and a musical interlude, a soldier took the Oath of Allegiance on behalf of the Swiss Forces. Moments before the end of the ceremony, flags were dipped and one minute silence observed, followed by the audience singing the first verse of the Swiss national anthem. Thereupon, the ceremony was declared closed and the guard of honour marched off followed by all participants to the nearby field canteen where mulled wine and sandwiches were served. If you were lucky!

Alain Dardelin



Autumn European Area Conference. Malta G.C. 4-7 November 2016.

The Malta G.C. Branch had generously stepped forward to host this autumn's EAC programme once again. As always, Malta offered Delegates and visitors a wide range of social activities, linked to the business session. The Swiss Branch was well-represented and took an active role in each facet of the 2016 programme.

Business Meeting.

Bob Hunt, EAC Chairman, welcomed 14 Delegates, the EAC President, Air Marshal Philip Sturley, the Service Vice-President, Air Marshal Graham Stacey, representatives of Central Council and a large audience of visitors attending Saturday's business session. Everyone remembered, in silence, the passing of some Members since the May 2016 EAC and especially AVM David Whittaker, who had done so much to steer the Association through some turbulent times and on course for the future.

This meeting had hoped to welcome back Simon Martin, the retired Overseas Areas Director. Unfortunately, Simon had recently had an accident in his home and was currently grounded.

In his review of current Association activities, Bob Hunt recognised that CHQ's proposals to change membership subscription renewal and certain other processes had caused concern and inconvenience to EAC Branches. These difficulties had been resolved and Branches would shortly receive a letter from CHQ confirming various enhancements to be introduced by 2017 in the areas of membership data management and communication channels.

Graham Stacey spoke enthusiastically about the modern RAF. Three factors best described its current status:



- A high level of operational demand.
- A growing entity, in terms of aircraft, manpower and commitments.
- A great team of highly-trained and motivated people.

EAC extended a further welcome to Air Vice Marshal John Cliffe, the newly-appointed Chairman of Central Council. In his presentation of Central Council's work, John explained plans to rejuvenate the Association, to turn around the decline in membership numbers, to control central expenditure and to improve the communication flow to the membership. An Operating Plan had been launched by and remained fully under the control of Central Council. The meeting also received an assurance that Central Council did recognise that national legislation varied between countries and was reviewing how each variation might affect RAFA now and in the future.

EAC traditionally meets immediately prior to each Annual Conference and also each autumn within an EAC Branch's territory. 2017 will find it enjoying some Costa del Sol sunshine. The meeting received and endorsed a proposal to hold the autumn 2018 meeting in Brussels, as guests of the Belgian Branch. Finally, an open debate considered any possible effects that the *Brexit* decision might have on this Area. Exchange rates, a reverse migration back to UK and a decline in the value of Sterling based pensions were flagged. EAC called upon Central Council and CHQ to pay full heed to what might be, when considering changes to RAFA policy and procedure. In his summing-up, Philip Sturley emphasised that the voices of EAC Branches must remain relevant to the Association now and for its future success.

Social Events

Back to the fun. The group first of all braved sunshine, warm temperatures and sometimes dense numbers of tourists to visit the ancient capital and city of Valletta (2018 European City of Culture). We had not expected a full guard of honour and Band of the Armed Forces of

Malta to welcome us but soon discovered that they were in fact welcoming an official delegation of the Netherlands Government!

Visits to the outstandingly beautiful city of Mdina and the more rural Island of Gozo followed. Enormous road improvement works prevented us from attending the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Floriana this year. A Sunday church service and thanksgiving was instead conducted under the wing of a C-47 in the fascinating ex-RAF station Ta'Qali's "Malta Aviation Museum". This was a new experience for many present. Descending deep into the once top secret underground radar station, set high on the Dingli Cliffs, was another high point of our group visits. (Major Tony Abela's book "Malta's Early Warning System during World War II" is a 'must' for anyone interested in the development and technicalities of this war-winning system).

A special honour granted all EAC participants was to meet Her Excellency The President of Malta, Mrs Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, for tea beside her swimming pool at her beautiful home and gardens, the San Anton Palace. This visit was followed by Welcome Drinks and Dinner in our hotel, during which the Malta G.C. Branch's well-organised Raffle raised over 1,000 Euros. Another highpoint of each EAC gathering is the formal Dinner. The San Antonio Hotel, Bugibba, provided both a large reception area and a generous meal for 98 Members and guests, including H.E. The British High Commissioner to Malta, the Maltese Minister for Home Affairs & National Security and the Armed Forces of Malta Operations Commander and their wives. We were entertained firstly by the Wallis Pipes & Drums of Malta (*suggested to Malta Branch by your scribe following their presence at the 2016 Basel Tattoo!*) and by the "Combi Band" of the Armed Forces of Malta, who played throughout the evening.

Well done, Tony Abela and all the Malta G.C. Branch Team, for again providing over 70 Delegates, Members and other visitors with a very busy but rewarding weekend in your lovely islands.

Welfare

The RAFA Head of Welfare, assisted by the European Area Director, had organised a Welfare Seminar to benefit from the presence in Malta of 11 European Area Honorary Welfare Officers, including our own HWO, Alain Dardelin. This very informative and thought-provoking course looked into all aspects involved in providing friendship, help and support to serving and ex-RAF personnel and their families facing difficulties. Specific focus was put upon identifying and supporting those suffering from any form of dementia and also those with visual or hearing impediments. A guest speaker, himself visually

impaired, brought home to HWOs the severity of these afflictions and how building a rapport through a friendly and sensitive approach, combined with the ability to listen and to make people feel at ease, remained vital to help those afflicted beat their isolation and loneliness.

RAFA is recognised as the eyes and ears of the RAF. Each Branch plays its part in maintaining a discrete contact with own its membership, as well as supporting the wider RAF Family. In this context, the Swiss Branch, amongst its other welfare work, maintains **The Swiss Branch Respite Break Fund**.

An Open Invitation

Access to Annual Conference and to both EAC meetings is NOT the preserve of Committee members. Everyone may attend; to hear about your Association's successes and even its problems, as well as providing you with an opportunity to meet colleagues from the Centre and from other Branches socially. Roundel provides you with the dates and locations. All you need then do is contact our Honorary Secretary, Margaret Duff, for guidance on the administrative arrangements.

Alan Baker (Swiss Branch Delegate)



Gold Wings for Dick Brooks



In October 2005, I was awarded the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) Silver Wings certificate for my first landings into Sweden from AOPA Denmark after doing the Danish flying test at Roskilde aerodrome.

My next goal was to achieve the Gold Wings requirements which entailed a solo flight to Land's End from Shoreham airport and return, with one landing at another airport en route, so I chose Exeter.

It was a lovely summer's day in 2016 when I set off in a PA 28 Warrior II from Shoreham. Air Traffic Control was very good all the way to Land's End, but I found myself stuck there for two days and nights because of bad visibility, low cloud and rain.

On the third day, I was able to take off early morning with full tanks and Air Traffic Control (ATC) clearance. The weather was fine until reaching Plymouth at 2,000ft when it all started to deteriorate and close in on me. It was a struggle to remain visual flight rules as per the Flight Plan as I was flying lower with high ground going under the wing tip and rain off the windscreen.

At this time, I lost radio contact with ATC so I called London Distress and Diversion (D and D) on emergency frequency 121.5. D and D were very helpful and seeing a gap in the low cloud I thought it best to climb and report VFR on top of cloud. This I did but it made map reading virtually impossible but D and D helped me keep clear of danger areas and controlled airspace until I was handed over to Bournemouth Radar. The weather and visibility improved with Bournemouth and I was able to commence a descent when I was handed over to Southampton Solent Radar when I could just see the Isle of Wight surrounded by sea fog.

On reaching just south abeam Thorney Island I was advised to call Goodwood then Shoreham when approaching Littlehampton reporting to enter the circuit. When passing Bognor Regis, Littlehampton was barely visible in fog ahead so I then called Shoreham ATC for joining instructions and was cleared to join cross-wind for runway 20 left-hand which I could see even though Worthing was nearly fogbound.

After a safe landing and having covered some 420 nautical miles I taxied slowly back to the Club where I was greeted by happy instructors, and unlike the Royal Singapore Flying Club's tradition of having to buy drinks all round in a crowded Club House on returning from qualifying cross-country flights over Malaya, I did not have to. Needless to say I am now eager to take the Platinum Wings!

Dick Brooks

(Dick is a Swiss Branch member based in the UK.—Ed.)



RIP Norman Thom BEM, *Légion d'Honneur*

A Life Member of the Swiss Branch, Norman, Thom BEM, *Légion d'Honneur*, died on 17 November 2016. Norman was a former Chairman of the Branch back in the 1970s or early '80s.

He volunteered for the RAF in 1941, trained as a Wireless Operator and was posted to 100 Squadron. His first mission was on Essen followed by the disas-

trous Nuremberg raid in which around 100 aircraft were lost as well as 700 men. His ninth raid was on Friedrichshafen on the night of 27/28 April 1944. Returning to England following the raid his Lancaster was jumped over the Vosges by a Ju-88 and the starboard wing caught fire. Waiting his turn to jump two successive explosions blasted Norman out of the aircraft. Unconscious, his parachute opened without his knowledge – Divine intervention? Well, he was the sole survivor! Arrested by a German patrol and imprisoned temporarily at an aerodrome he knocked out his jailer and took to his heels to Switzerland where he crossed the border on 11 May and after interrogation was interned in the Hotel Bellevue, Glion. Fed up he did another 'runner' on 26 August 1944 with two other internees, crossed the Col de la Reculaz into France and La Chapelle. Aided by the Maquis they eventually met up with the Americans at Grenoble. Transported from St Tropez to North Africa, Norman eventually returned to England, not by courtesy of BOAC, which ensured the military traffic from North Africa to London, but in a draughty Dakota to Bristol in early September. After the war, Norman returned to Switzerland and worked at the New Zealand Mission in Geneva. However, he returned to They-sous-Monfort every year to pay his respects to his comrades buried there. A square in the village was named in his honour a few years ago.

The Funeral ceremony

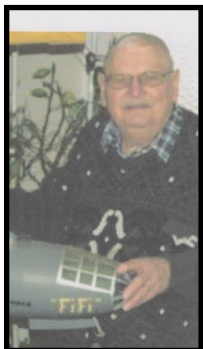
Norman's funeral was a beautiful moving ceremony. The church was practically full. Mr. Daniel Bouchet, the mayor of Cruseilles and some of the municipal council were present. Mr. Jacques Beauquis, president of the canton's *Souvenir Français* section was present, along with Jean Gilbert, FFL (formerly with the Free French 1st Division) a native of Cruseilles and *Officier de la Légion d'Honneur* who had also decorated Norman with his *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* on 5 December 2015 right there in Cruseilles. General de Giuli the *Souvenir Français* delegate-general was unable to attend and had sent his excuses to Bernadette, Norman's wife. *Anciens combattants* paraded six standards including the one for the *Légion d'Honneur*. The RAFA Lyons branch was represented by Brian Rosen, Sean Brady with his wife Peggy and Pierre Biard the branch's Standard Bearer. The Swiss branch was represented by Régis Pizot and Alain Dardelin, our branch Standard Bearer. Tony Kupfer was also present with his wife Arlette. Military honours were rendered in the church to the strains of the British and French national anthems.

(Norman Thom contd.)

On the square outside the church honours were rendered again before the coffin was handed over to the funeral directors.

When he was still alive Norman had expressed the wish that, on the day of his funeral, people should raise a glass to his memory and so, in accordance with that wish, after the ceremony, we all raised a glass in friendship. We offer Norman's family our sincere condolences.

Bryan Pattison and Régis Pizot



RAFA Swiss branch lost a good friend and enthusiastic aircraft modeller in Maurice Prudent, who died 28 November 2016. His aircraft models were displayed in the Clairvaux-les-Lacs museum.

In this, the last, edition of Roundel for 2016, we would like to wish all our Members the Compliments of the Season and a Healthy and Happy 2017 and to thank each and everyone for all their support and help.

At Christmas our aim is, as usual, to ensure that all our Branch Members are fully aware that we are there to help whenever or wherever necessary. A simple email, in case of need, to our Branch address hostmaster@rafa-swissbranch.co.uk or, if you don't have email, a note to our post-box at

Royal Air Forces Association

PO Box 55

CH-1218 Le Grand-Saconnex

will reach us and allow us to help.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Deceased Members and Friends

Norman Thom BEM, *Chévalier de l'Ordre national de la Légion d'Honneur*, Life Member, died 17 November 2016

Sheila Pasche-Scott, Associate Member, RAFA Swiss branch, 15 June 2016

Antoine Berntsen, Associate Member, RAFA Swiss branch, died 14 December 2016

Maurice Prudent, friend of RAFA Swiss branch, 28 November 2016



Diary 2017

Date	Time	Event	Venue
15 January 2017	11.59	Branch Brunch	Crowne Plaza Geneva, Geneva
4 March 2017	09.30 for 10.00	Annual General Meeting	Crowne Plaza Geneva, Geneva
April 2017	10.30	Anniversary of the Battle of the Plateau des Glières 1944	Nécropole Nationale des Glières à Morette
15 or 22 April 2017	10.30	61 Sqn Lancaster Commemoration	<u>La Chapelle Thècle</u>
25 April 2017	10.30	ANZAC Day	CWGC Cemetery, <u>Vevey</u>
12 May 2017	10.00	European Area Conference	Yarnfield Park Staffordshire
12-14 May 2017	Weekend	RAFA Annual Conference	Yarnfield Park Staffordshire
3 June 2017	12.30	Summer Lunch/Excursion	Hôtel Restaurant du Port, Yvoire
August 2017	10.00/TBC	Plateau des Daines	Plateau des Daines
17 September 2017	10.40	Battle of Britain Commemoration & Lunch	Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery, <u>Vevey</u>
22 October 2017	10.30	78 Sqn. Halifax Commemoration 78-Squadron	<u>Montcony, France</u>
November 2017		Joint BRA RBL RAFA Lunch	Zurich
11 November 2017	10.40	Armistice Day	Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery, <u>Vevey</u>
11 November 2017	12.30	Armistice Day	French Consulate General, Geneva
12 November 2017	10.30	Remembrance Sunday	Parc Mon Repos, Geneva
November 2017	11.00	RBL AGM & Lunch	Hotel des Alpes, Nyon/TBC