



Wing Commander Brian Neville Wanstall OBE, RAF RIP

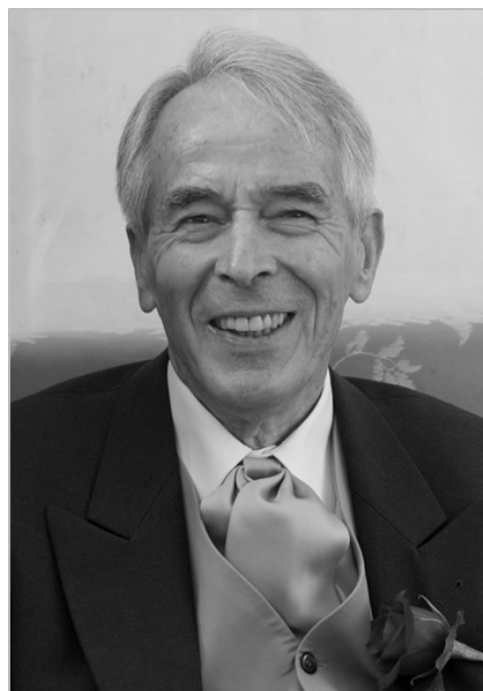
President of the Royal Air Forces Association Swiss Branch

We lost him on 13 August - after a long fight. Our president went peacefully. The 18 August saw a splendid turnout at the Temple de Champel to give him an excellent send-off. His family was there, his friends and colleagues were there, all associations were there - in addition to RAFA. Wing Commander Brian Wanstall OBE, RAF was honoured. Our friend Brian was remembered and celebrated. (Ed.)

His brother, Michael writes: Brian Neville Wanstall was born 5 November 1929 at Hythe in Kent, the first child of Frank and Lilian Wanstall. Frank owned a small bus business providing a service between Hythe and Ashford and the family lived at Palmars, just outside Hythe. With his younger brother Michael, born a couple of years later, Brian attended the local Church of England infants school in Hythe.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 was to prove a very significant event in Brian's life. With the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940 the government decided to evacuate all children along the Channel coast because of the fear of invasion and the whole Hythe Infants School, including teachers, was evacuated at very short notice to Pembrokeshire in West Wales. Because of the difference in ages, the Wanstall brothers were sent to separate locations, and although only a few miles apart, they rarely met during the three year evacuation period. Because of wartime difficulties and the pressures of running what was designated an essential transport service, parental visits were an annual event. Brian's first billeting was not a very happy one - he famously wrote home complaining that there was no tablecloth on the table at mealtimes. He then moved to live with the village grocer and his family in a place called Boncath, not far from Cardigan. There he settled happily.

By this time, Brian was of secondary school age and, having passed the dreaded 11-plus exam, he went to Cardigan County School, where the curriculum included the Welsh language. In the summer of 1943, when Michael was due to start secondary school, the invasion threat had largely retreated and their parents decided that the boys should return home. The war was still very much a factor in everyday life and these were exciting times for a young boy. Living so close to the coast, with a fighter airfield a few miles away meant that there was a great deal of aerial action overhead night and day and the arrival of the V1 'Doodlebugs' increased it. For Brian and his friends this meant lots of opportunities to collect souvenirs from crashed aircraft and shrapnel from gardens and



streets and Brian would cycle miles on his bike looking for targets. Both boys joined the local Sea Scouts, but it being wartime access to the sea was impossible because of coastal security.

In September 1943 the boys entered Ashford Grammar School. Shortly afterwards, their father sold his bus business and the family went to live at Bank Farm in Aldington, near Ashford, to cover for Brian's uncle, who had come off decidedly second-best in a confrontation with a large bull.

Brian left school in September 1946 at the age of 16 and went to work as a laboratory assistant at Express Dairies in North London. In 1948 he was called up for National Service with the RAF as a Nursing Orderly. This was to be the beginning of a long career in the RAF. At the end of his period of National Service in 1950 Brian signed on and trained as a fighter pilot. Having gained both his wings and his Commission he served at various locations and, while on a posting to Wunstorf in Germany, he met his first wife, Waltraut, known to everyone as Val. They married in 1954 and had two daughters, Sara, born in 1955 and Caroline, born in 1958.

Brian's air force career continued to flourish but during a posting to Singapore in 1972, where Brian oversaw the RAF arrangements for the Queen's visit, Val died suddenly at the age of only 40. At the time, Sara and Caroline were at boarding school in the UK and Brian returned from Singapore to a UK posting. These were obviously very difficult times for the family.

Some years later, while on holiday in Tunisia, Brian met Marianne and they were married in 1974. A son, David, arrived in 1980.

In 1982 Brian retired from the RAF with the rank of Wing Commander and was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

Marianne and Brian moved to Geneva, Marianne's home city, in 1982 and Brian's skill with words, coupled with his RAF background, led to a post as a technical journalist with *Interavia*, an international aviation magazine. He also became heavily involved in the activities of the Swiss branch of the RAF Association. He still found time to pursue his interest in the history of the Wanstall family, establishing links with Wanstalls in all corners of the globe. Together with them he established a direct line of ancestry back to the 16th century.

Like most grandfathers, Brian delighted in his grandchildren, Anneka, Pia and Guy, Sara and Steve's children, and the latest arrival, James Pierre, son of David and Nicky. He will be missed by them and by all the family. He will also be remembered with respect and affection by all who knew him across a wide-ranging and varied life.

How I feel about death...

I feel death is nothing to be scared of, as there is no chance of escaping it. If anything it should be celebrated as well as mourned, because the person who died moves on to a different stage of life, and you should too. The dead should be remembered for what they did, their positives, think more of them than "they're gone and not coming back" because in my opinion they're still with you, maybe not in physical form, but in a spiritual form, and they'll never leave your side.

Guy



Claims to fame



Three languages, 30 years RAF service, three secondments as staff officer, one tour of duty as base commander at RAF Cottesmore, responsible for setting up and running the *Tornado* Training Establishment from scratch, memberships of two professional institutes, Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, holder of the GSM (Borneo) and the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM) medal for his service during the Indonesian/Malaysian confrontation in the 1960s, active member of the Royal Air Forces Association Swiss Branch, member of the committee, conference delegate, editor of *Roundel* and 26 years among us as husband, father, colleague and friend.



The Temple de Champel was packed on 18 August to remember and celebrate Brian's life. Reading back the 'claims to fame' above, Brian certainly lived his time to the full. He served in myriad capacities; accomplished pilot on at least three aircraft types (*Harvard*, *Vampire* and *Hastings*), knowledgeable colleague in the aerospace publishing sector, able and effective staff officer and base commander, both nationally and internationally, active member of RAFA, vibrant member of the British community in and around Geneva. He is, and will remain, a very hard act to follow. Rest well, Brian.

Dear Editor,

I too hold many wonderful memories of sharing in Brian Wanstall's RAFA Swiss Branch work and exploits. To me, unique amongst those memories is the story of the Berlin Hastings.

Everyone will be familiar with the Handley Page Hastings troop carrier and freighter derivative of the H.P. Halifax, whose Bristol Hercules piston engines could be heard grinding their way around the world between 1948 and the mid-1970s. Brian's logbook will show that he piloted this lumbering beast, amongst his other aircraft types, primarily serving British Army involvement in the Malaysia/Indonesia crisis, whilst being based in Singapore.

The Hastings became one of the RAF's hard-working stalwarts of the Berlin Airlift period (1948-1949). A survivor, TG503, is lovingly cared-for by the "Allied Museum" in Berlin, having flown the last ever Hastings flight into what was then RAF Gatow. (This same aircraft, by the way, had undertaken a world sales tour in 1948, before commencing its mundane job of hauling coal etc. along the Berlin corridors).

It came as a very welcome surprise when the Allied Museum extended an invitation to the Swiss Branch to share in an impressive number of events organised by themselves and the Berlin authorities to commemorate the *Luftbrücke*, in June 2008. A small group of Branch Members, naturally including Brian, flew out to Berlin (by Airbus and not Hastings!), braved the countless steps to enter/exit S-Bahn stations and assembled at the Memorial outside the famous Tempelhof Airport. Upon identifying ourselves on arrival, dignitaries from the Museum, Government, RAF, FAF and USAF rushed forward to welcome us as VIPs. Quite rightly singled-out for attention was our very own ex-Hastings pilot, Brian. However, they made Brian work for his *Bier und Currywurst* by inviting him to talk to German TV and Press journalists ON the Hastings itself, which he gladly did. It was like he had gone back in time, recalling all the technical delights and problems encountered in flying the Hastings around tropical skies in a time of conflict. Brian loved that visit to Berlin and we all enjoyed hearing his stories of a time when the RAF's transport fleet came from another era.

As a postscript, Brian discovered that another ex-RAF guest, who had retired at AVM rank, had flown the Hastings with him in Borneo. Similarly, we were all delighted to chat to Gail Halvorson, the famous USAF "Candy Bomber", who threw "candies" out of his C-118 cockpit window to hungry Berlin kids watching the constant flow of aircraft arriving in Tempelhof.

Thank you, Brian, for these and the many other experiences that we enjoyed with you.

Alan Baker.

August 1944 – Valleiry liberated

Alain Dardelin

On 16 August 1944, the sun-drenched commune of Valleiry in Haute-Savoie was liberated from the occupying forces. Fighting had been fierce, houses and farms had been set on fire and those inhabitants who could not escape and take refuge in neighbouring Switzerland were randomly killed by the German troops based at Fort l'Ecluse.

On the very same day seventy-three years later, a crowd of officials, both civilian and military, French and Swiss, representatives of veterans' associations and their 11 standards, plus some 40 locals, assembled at the Franco-Swiss memorial to remember the Resistance which played the vital role in the liberation of Valleiry and nearby villages. RAFA Swiss branch was represented by standard bearer Alain Dardelin.

The ceremony was conducted by Mr. Frédéric Mugnier, mayor, with Member of Parliament Mr. Cyril Pellevat in attendance.



A wreath was laid followed by a minute's silence. The music played throughout the ceremony included *Le Chant des Partisans*, *Les Allobroges* and *La Marseillaise*.

All present were invited to a *vin d'honneur* courtesy of the municipality.

Battle of Britain Sunday, Vevey, 17 September 2017

Alan Baker

Greying skies and the threat of impending rain could not deter 30 Members and guests from congregating in the CWGC cemetery, St Martin's Church, Vevey for the Branch's traditional Service of Remembrance.

Whilst The Battle of Britain took place 77 years ago, its memory lives on amongst generations born many years thereafter.

Commencing on the dot of 11.00, our Branch Standard Bearers, Alain Dardelin and John Hannon, defied the elements without their customary capes



and Branch Member Peter Fairgrieve took up his bugle for the short service of remembrance that followed.



Wreaths were laid by Lorraine Clay on behalf of the Ambassador of the UK to Switzerland, Consul-General Suzanne Stein and Jillian Dempster for Australia and New Zealand, Colonel Lang for the

Swiss Confederation and Nick Meyer for RAFA. Prayers and readings were shared between Anne Spicer, Bryan Pattison, Brian Barrow, Graham Robertson and Robbin Davies.

In his address, our Branch Chaplain, Roy Damary, recalled that 1940 had also seen the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk and accusations had been rife thereafter amongst some Army personnel that the RAF had not played an adequate role in alleviating that catastrophe. A recent movie appeared to support that perspective, whereas a concurrent TV documentary had fortunately presented facts to counterbalance any lingering misperception of the RAF's role and its gallantry during that sad period in our history.



The rain arrived just before many of us descended the hill to enjoy another informal lunch, held inside the ever-popular *Restaurant du Port*. Several old friendships were renewed and some memories revived by the circulation of Roy Damary's book of wartime "Jane" cartoon strips. I also managed to reduce our stock of Branch ties by another sale!

Operation Pedestal

Bryan Pattison



From 1940 to 1942, the Axis conducted the Siege of Malta with air and naval forces. Despite many losses, enough supplies were delivered by the British for the population and military forces on Malta to resist.

While Italian and German bombers brought havoc to the Maltese islands, the problem of supplies was soon felt. An invasion threat in July 1941 ended in complete failure when coast defenders spotted torpedo boats of the Italian special forces. Whilst people suffered hunger, a final assault to neutralise the island was ordered by Field Marshal Kesselring. However, the people's heroism withstood every attack. On 15 April 1942 King George VI awarded the George Cross to the people of Malta in appreciation of their heroism.



The George Cross was awarded during the worst period for the Allies during the Second World War, as the Axis-force clearly appeared to have the upper hand. German planes were striking the island around the clock, day and night, with an incredible amount of bombs and munitions in an attempt to neutralise the British bases in Malta, since these were constantly getting in the way of their naval attempts to supply Rommel's North-African campaign. Malta's geographic position, wedged as it is between Italy and North Africa, as well as dividing the Mediterranean basin into east and west put the islands in heavy danger. Malta-based British aircraft could reach as far as Tripoli in Libya to the south, Tunisia to the west and right over German bases in Italy, thus, standing right on the route of Italian convoys supplying Rommel's Afrika Korps.

At the time of the George Cross award, military resources and food rations in Malta were practically finished. Fuel was restricted to military action and

heavily rationed, the population was on the brink of starvation, and even ammunition was running out, so much that Anti-Aircraft guns could only fire a few rounds per day.

Admiralty planning for Operation Pedestal began in late July 1942. The convoy comprised 14 merchant vessels, the most important being SS *Ohio*, the only



large, fast tanker available, an American ship loaned to the British, with a British crew. As insurance against the loss of *Ohio* and its 12,000 tons of oil, the other ships were to carry fuel in drums. The convoy was to be protected by 2 battleships, 3 aircraft carriers, 7 cruisers, 32 destroyers and 7 submarines, the largest escort force yet.

The most crucial supply item in Operation Pedestal was fuel, carried by SS *Ohio*. The convoy sailed from Britain on 3 August 1942 and passed through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean on the night of 9/10 August.

The Axis attempt to prevent the fifty ships of the convoy reaching Malta, using bombers, German E-boats, Italian MAS and MS boats, minefields and submarine ambushes, was the last Axis Mediterranean victory. While a costly tactical defeat for the Allies, it was also one of the greatest British strategic victories of the war. More than 500 Merchant and Royal Navy sailors and airmen were killed and only five of the 14 merchant ships reached Grand Harbour in Valetta on 15 August 1942 – the Feast of Santa Maria. SS *Ohio* had

been bombed so badly by enemy fighters that her back was broken and was in danger of sinking. But she was supported into port by HMS *Ledbury* and HMS *Penn* lashed to *Ohio* on either side with HMS *Rye* acting as a stabiliser at the stern.



The arrival of *Ohio* justified the decision to hazard so many warships; its cargo of aviation fuel revitalised the Maltese air

offensive against Axis shipping. Submarines returned to Malta and Spitfires flown from the aircraft carrier HMS *Furious* enabled a maximum effort to be made against Axis ships. Italian convoys had to detour further away from the island, lengthening the journey and increasing the time during which air and naval attacks could be mounted. The Siege of Malta was broken by the Allied reconquest of Egypt and Libya after the Second Battle of El Alamein (23 October – 11 November) and by Operation Torch (8–16 November) in the western Mediterranean, which enabled land-based aircraft to escort merchant ships to the island.

To-date, this event remains commemorated in Malta in remembrance of that gift from heaven, the Convoy of Santa Maria, and all the men who lived and died in this and previous attempts to bring supplies to Malta.

Thus it was that Margaret and Bryan were invited to participate in the 75th annual commemoration during their short stay in Malta in August.

The Memorial to Operation Pedestal, which comprises a ship's anchor, is located near the Old Customs House overlooking the Grand Harbour. A large crowd gathered and personalities included Her Excellency The President of Malta, the British High Commissioner, the US Ambassador, the Chairman of Malta RBL and GCIA and the Chairman of Malta GC RAFA amongst others. The Malta GC RAFA Standard was paraded together with four other Standards. Also present was a detachment of the Malta Command World War II Living History Group. The memorial service was conducted by the Chancellor of St Paul's Pro-Cathedral, Valetta assisted by the European Co-ordinator Apostleship of the Sea. Several speeches were made and many wreaths were laid during the ceremony.

[Credit is due to many sources for background.]

Plateau des Daines 2017

Alain Dardelin

The ceremony convened for 19 August 2017 to mark the 73rd anniversary of the Liberation of Haute-Savoie and the Frangy area by the Résistance was delayed to 9 September.

Much to our disappointment, the weather which had been fine till then, turned nasty and rain spoilt the event for the lowest attendance in years of 20 or so people sheltered under a marquee. Fortunately my rain cape proved itself once more to be of good use.

The number of standard bearers was reduced to seven made up of six French veterans and the RAFA Swiss branch. The RAFA delegation consisted of Bryan Pattison, Margaret Duff and myself.



André Blanc delivering his impassioned speech despite the inclement weather. Photo courtesy of Dauphiné Libéré

The mayor of Chaumont, Mr André-Gilles Chatagnat, welcomed all to the commemoration service. He then handed over the microphone to André Blanc who delivered a vibrant speech paying tribute to the memory of his grand-parents Charles and Laurence, the members of the “Réseau Alliance”, the S.O.E. and the men and women who contributed to the Liberation often at the expense of their lives.

With rain persisting, André Blanc took it upon himself to shorten the ceremony. Bryan Pattison laid a poppy wreath for RAFA, then jointly with André Blanc one on behalf of *Souvenir Français*. A minute's silence followed.

The mayor invited us back to the village hall for a welcome *vin d'honneur*. More celebration was to come as 9 of us walked across the road to the *Auberge du Pralet* where Michelle Blanc had made arrangements for us to enjoy the local cuisine.

Breitling Sion Airshow, 15-17 September 2017

Alan Baker, photos courtesy of Stefan Bowen

This mixed military and civilian air show, billed as the largest Swiss air event of 2017, took over the entire Sion Airport for three mid-September days. RAFA-Swiss Branch, for valid reasons, had no presence amongst the many commercial entities promoting their products and services. Nevertheless, a number of Branch Members attended on one or more days to admire an impressive static display of aircraft ancient and modern, as well as to view a lively air display over six hours long.



As this show coincided with Battle of Britain weekend, it was no surprise that the RAF could not be represented. The show's participants compensated by arranging for an ex-RAF *Hunter* and a French registered *Hurricane* to perform an aerial ballet, to the music of “Land of Hope and Glory”. Plane Sailing's PB5-5A *Catalina* also came over from Duxford for the flying display and an ex-RAF *Chipmunk*, in full RAF markings, was placed amongst the long line of very elderly light aircraft – memories of open days at Old Warden.



Breitling's show promotion had focussed on the return to Switzerland of their DC3-A after its world tour and we were not to be disappointed. Sadly, their *Super-Constellation* remains unserviceable and needs further funds before it next rumbles around European skies.

Pride of place amongst the formation teams must go to the *Frecce Tricolori*, whose MB-339s put on an enhanced version of their famous (infamous?) aerial ballet, choking the airfield with patriotic red, white & green smoke trails and probably invigorated by Pavarotti's recorded rendering of Puccini's *Nessun Dorma* – if the pilots could hear it.

Following 65 years spent in Sion, the Swiss Air Force will move its ageing F-5 *Tigers* elsewhere and vacate most of Base Aérienne 14 at the end of 2017. The fate of this military/civilian airport will be interesting but a new airline, 'Powdair', plans to commence operations from there for the 2017-2018 ski season and beyond. Also of interest was the presence of most jet fighter manufacturers, promoting their newest products to the Swiss Air Force and to those who will foot the bill.

From Glières—to here



(We made the acquaintance of the 'Special Duty Squadrons' as a result of our presence at the ceremonies surrounding the Glières commemorations. Here we touch

briefly on particular problems confronting the crews of those squadrons. Ed.)

Navigation for the crews of the Special Duties Squadrons was particularly difficult, as they had to find a tiny target after flying alone and, often at low level, for hours across enemy occupied territory. The success of their missions depended heavily on the navigator maintaining an extremely high degree of skill in finding that pinpoint, marked by torches or bonfires. Despite instructions to the Reception Committees to find and use sites that would be easily visible from the air this was not always possible, and the lights could be partly hidden by woodland or set in a valley. If the sites were not found easily and quickly this would necessitate the aircraft having to search the area looking for the marker; all the time the aircraft was circling and trying to locate the pinpoint the risk to both those in the air and those on the ground, (by alerting the Germans), was increased.

In the large, four-engined aircraft (the *Halifaxes* and *Stirlings*), the navigator's compartment was blacked out and he had no view of the outside. These aircraft usually had a Bomb Aimer in the crew,

which might seem unusual as they were not involved in bombing operations; it was his job, once the enemy coast had been crossed, to take up his position in the nose of the aircraft and become the "eyes" of the navigator. From his position he could see ground details such as rivers, railways and other landmarks and relay this information, over the intercom, to the navigator.

On the *Hudson* Flight the navigator's position allowed him a view of the world outside, provided interior lights were extinguished, and so he would be able, with the use of landmarks, to "map read" his way to the dropping zone.

Those piloting *Lysanders* did not have the luxury of an extra pair of eyes. They flew these operations with a carefully folded map attached to one thigh and depended on accurate map reading in order to reach their targets.

Navigation aids

There was a need to reduce the number of missions that were not completed either because of navigational difficulties or problems with the weather, so a guidance system and a communication system were introduced. However, it was not possible for the supply of this equipment to meet the demand. Also, the ground base equipment had to be parachuted to the operators and, despite careful packing, there was a certain amount of loss due to damage.

The introduction of this equipment led to other complications; an agent had to be specially trained to use it and, in the aircraft, it meant that a crew member had another set of buttons and gadgets to attend to. For the ground crews back at Tempsford there was now an extra workload, as this sensitive and technical equipment had to be fitted and maintained.

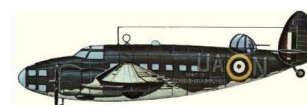
Eureka/Rebecca

This was, as the name suggests, a two-part system which would assist with the location of pinpoints.

The "*Rebecca*" component, a transmitter/receiver set, was fitted into the aircraft and the second half of the system ("*Eureka*") was portable and ground based.

The effective range was approximately 80 miles. When nearing the pinpoint "*Rebecca*" would be turned on and it would start to send a signal. When the ground based "*Eureka*" received the signal it would send a reply. The reply was received by two aerials, one mounted each side of the aircraft, which meant that the on board equipment could now display a bearing for the navigator to relay to the pilot.

(To be continued.)



Obituary notice

We deeply regret to announce that the following Branch Members have died:

Wing Commander Brian Neville Wanstall OBE

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. With thanks to everybody.

List of Events for 2017

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

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

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

Don't hesitate to ask a Committee Member for information