

**RANCH
MEMBERSHIP
198**

ROYAL AIR FORCES Association

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

**THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH (including Stevenage)**

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SPECIAL ISSUE 2025

LETCHWORTH ARMED FORCES DAY

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RAFAGEN

The official newsletter and magazine of the
ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION
LETCHWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2025/6



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**VISIT OUR
WEBSITE**

rafa-leitchworth.org.uk



***IT IS THE DEEPEST OF
REGRETS THAT WE
ANNOUNCE THE DEATH OF
MEMBER***

ERIC DAGLESS

***WHO PASSED AWAY IN LISTER
HOSPITAL STEVENAGE ON 11th July
2025.***



Eric was well known all over Letchworth Garden City, mainly due to positions he held in two of the Veteran Groups in the town.

For the R.A.F.A. He was a Committee member holding the position of Wings Appeal Officer. For the R.B.L. He was the Branch President.

Eric joined the Branch 6 years ago as an Associate member, as Eric had never been in the Royal Air Force, as his service life was that of a soldier. It wasn't long before he was elected onto our Committee, and soon appointed to that of Wings Appeal Officer, and we soon learnt that he took his post seriously.

My first venture with Eric at one of his Wings Appeal collecting events was at Letchworth Sainsburys.. I soon noticed that very few customers passed our table without greeting Eric and making a donation. This was because Letchworth Sainsburys was his post for the annual Poppy Appeal and this was where the public got to know Eric.



At this year's Armed Forces Day, it was Eric's duty as R.B.L. Branch President to escort the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire around the show. Our picture shows Eric, dressed in his R.B.L. Uniform, bringing Lieutenant General Sir George

Norton KCVO CBE to the R.A.F.A. Stall to meet his crew.

Our condolences go out to Eric's family at this sad time.



Top row L to R: Christmas NAAFI Break; Committee meeting; Wings Appeal Stall;


Centre row Both at a Battle of Britain Service;


Bottom row: A smart row of military men and women at the 2021 Armed Forces Day. Eric is the third non uniform from the left.



NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



 I have just returned from a day at the Letchworth Armed Forces Day where I, along with other members of the Branch collected for the Wings Appeal, and represented the Branch and the Association and the works we do. The temperature was up in the late 20's, but every now and again there would be a short gust of cooling wind to make the dozens of RAFA windmills carried by dozens of small children, spin like mad to the delight of the child.

 For me there was one part of the day which really annoyed me, and that was at the close of the day. This year the AFD Committee decided to close the proceedings in true military style, by playing the National Anthem. The time came and the band struck up the first few bars. Most members of the public stood still with a young lady singing the words, but I would say there was about 15% of those present carried on walking around the site, weaving in and out of those who were standing in respect. These were not young children who had not been told how to behave when the National Anthem is played, but these were adults who should have known better.



I decided to design a new poster to advertise our NAAFI BREAK. I wanted it to be more colourful and eye catching. On Google I found a picture of two red mugs with the words “NAAFI BREAK”.

Ideal. Poster finished. Displayed for the first time on the Stall at the Armed Forces Day. I wish we had the mugs for sale on the stand, as we were asked if we sold them. NAAFI BREAK brings back lots of memories for all ex service veterans.




As I write this note, we are just starting our third Heat wave of 2025. In between Heat wave number 2 and 3 we had heavy rain, Which made me think of back in the mid 1950's. Her Majesty sent me to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) for a working holiday. Why is the weather making me think of those days, well R.A.F Negmbo is on the West coast of the island and the temperature is always in the late 20° as it is here now. Twice a year we would have the monsoon season, when it poured with rain, and it cools down, as it has here.

I missed Ceylon, and now I am thinking that Ceylon may have missed me, and has sent the weather north. The only problem is that when I was in Ceylon I was in my late teens and took the heat in my stride. Now at my age the heat is getting a little too much. I am now looking towards Spain and their afternoon Siesta



The advertisement on the next page was taken from a Saga Magazine. I am hoping that Saga and H.M. Government will not mind me using it, as I feel that it comes under Welfare of the aged, and after all that that is what the Association is here for, albeit we are for the R.A.F family.

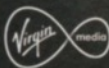


Landline phones
are switching to
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What you have
been saying about
RAFAGEN.



Ken

I enjoyed reading yours and Jim's early experiences of introduction to R.A.F. Service life in the latest issue of RAFAGEN. Compiling the Newsletter is obviously a heard and time consuming activity, and you are doing a really good job. So well done.

Some years ago I wrote and published my own story of my two years National Service in the R.A.F.

Bernard Drummond

Editor Thank you for those kind words Bernard. All I can say is that I enjoy compiling RAFAGEN .Especially when I receive members stories to include. Thank you for the Abbreviated story of your National Service life. You will find it reproduced latter in this issue.



NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION



They were there for us in our darkest days. We must not fail them in theirs.

For over 90 years, the RAF Association has championed a simple belief – that no member of the RAF community should ever be left without the help that they need.

Not since WWII has the RAF been so constantly deployed on global operations – and across the generations, the need for support is becoming ever more complex. Demand for our services is therefore increasing significantly.

For the sake of everyone who needs our help, we must continue to evolve and innovate to meet these new challenges and remain at the leading edge of service provision. We must champion the best interests of the RAF community more strongly than ever before.

Only then can we be sure that every member of our RAF community is receiving the support they need and deserve.

MAY NAAFI BREAK



Everyone signs in whilst the host collects the dues.



Introducing new member Jim (Left) along with Bernard and Ron



RAFAGEN editor talks to Ewen (hidden) about a future item for RAFAGEN whilst Ted and Tom carry on with their remembering the good old days.



COMMITTEE NEWS

July 2025

The usual Branch administrative items over, the Committee got on to the interesting stuff.

As you will have already heard, we will not be holding a Christmas Bash this year. The decision was taken after we learnt that many members are invited to other functions before Christmas, and there is always the R.A.F. Henlow Christmas lunch. So we have decided on a New Year Bash. The question that was raised at the meeting was “WHERE”. We are looking for somewhere a little different. Over the next few weeks the members of the Committee will be asking members a number of questions so that plans can be made with the approval of all interested.

Jim put forward the details he had on the visit to the Mosquito Museum at South Mimms. The visit will be on 1st October. Time to be confirmed, but the price will be Members £12 Non Members £17. Our visit will be a guided tour of the museum with a guide. In order to keep costs down, members are asked to make their own way to the museum. Members needing transport please speak to a member of the committee.

Ken agreed that he would virtually attend the Annual Conference in October. The Chairman added that although Ken was representing the branch, and members can also attend virtually. All interested members please have a word with Ken.

All preparations for the Annual Battle of Britain service was in hand with invitations ready to go out to the dignities of the area.

Coffee cups empty. Time to pack up.

LETCWORTH ARMED FORCES DAY GALLERY





Photos by
Umesh
Sachania



NATIONAL SERVICE IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

November 9th 1949 until November 30th 1951

Life at R.A.F. Basic Training as seen by Bernard Drummond

Armed with my travel pass, I set off.

I caught the tube to Euston Station, then British Rail to Warrington where we boarded transport for our destination, R.A.F. Padgate. This name would have suited any criminal institution and was one of the R.A.F.'s centres for recycling spotty civilians into little "erks". Padgate was the first staging post in the process of trying to achieve a semblance of uniformity amongst we very raw recruits.

We were supplied with kit bags and shown how to stencil our individual service numbers on to them, (Mine being 2450945), fitted out with our uniforms and accessories and generally shuffled from one giant hanger to another whilst being "processed".

One memory that stands out was the first introduction to Service catering. After a day of travelling, and being ordered from pillar to post, we were starving, and more than ready for our first meal. We were marched to the cookhouse, where we joined the long queue for food. Grabbing a plate, and clutching our newly acquired "irons", (service parlance for knife, fork and spoon,) we shuffled along in great expectation. When I reached the first of the servers, I discovered that the great steaming vats contained a type of stew, and as I received mine, and was anxiously looking for some trace of meat amidst the mess of beans and vegetables, a projectile in the shape of a dollop of mashed potatoes, delivered from a great height, splashed on to my plate. Whilst shuffling along the line, wiping the gravy off my sleeve, I failed to see what was coming next. As if by magic, a portion of beetroot was deposited on to my plate, turning the already congealing mess not only pink, but as a result, completely uneatable. As I stood there in a state of shock, the queue behind me was backing up, but



I ignored the pushing, and tried to explain to the idiot wielding the large spoon that whilst I liked beetroot in salad etc, beetroot in stew was a culinary disaster, and would he kindly organise another helping of stew and potatoes sans the beetroot?

This was not the last mistake that I was to make during my National Service, but for starters, it was sensational. My ears were still ringing from the screams of the orderly NCO as he subjected me to a stream of invective that everyone but me seemed to find amusing. I got out of his sight as soon as I could, dumped the stew, and joined the queue for pudding trying my best to become invisible, but driven on by hunger. The lesson learned that day, and remembered during the coming period of service life, was never to try to reason with those in authority!

Apart from that little adventure, the five days spent at R.A.F. Padgate were boring and repetitive, the exception being our visit to the infirmary for the smallpox vaccinations. This proved to be an eye-opener, and the first time that I was to witness a young man rendered unconscious without being hit, perhaps because since the age of 14 I had boxed, firstly for The Army Cadets and the subsequently for two famous boxing clubs in London. Later on, during my service life I was to hear of men keeling over before, and after inoculations, but fortunately with the great majority

of my fellows, I only suffered the usual effects of jabs, which was mainly just a sore arm, or a slight headache.

As we trudged from one giant hanger to another being kitted out, our civvies were parcelled and sent off home, and we started to get used to our new “screaming blue” uniforms. Nothing singles out a new recruit quite like his new spotless uniform, and as we were led around the barracks we were constantly taunted by those veterans of one- or two-weeks service,



with cries of “you’ll be sorry”.

Eventually we were ready for the next stage of our induction to service life, which was ‘basic training’ commonly known as ‘square bashing’. Most of us included in that group at Padgate were Southerners, and as such, we were destined to draw the short straw when it came to venues. Our destination was R.A.F. West Kirby, a God forsaken sight at the best of times, but in November of 1949, it became very much a case of “see the Wirral and die”!

It all started pleasantly enough arriving at the local station, our train was met by a hard-faced reception party of Officers and NCOs, the majority

of which were the dreaded drill instructors, each armed with their weapon of authority, a drill cane.

I suppose that we were a rabble, and a sorry sight as we alighted from the train dragging our kit behind us, but the screaming of the Drill instructors soon got us into a resemblance of order. Our kit bags were piled into a truck, and we lined up and set off for the barracks, led by an R.A.F. band. As we neared R.A.F. West Kirby, the band struck up with "The R.A.F. March Past". Raw recruits we may have been, but the sound of this rousing tune made us straighten up and start to march with a fresh spring in our step. It was then that I suddenly noticed the posterior of the man marching directly in front of me.

He was a little on the fat side, and as he changed from slouching to a resemblance of marching, his water bottle, that was hanging from the rear of his belt, started swinging to and fro like a pendulum of a clock across his backside, it was strangely fascinating, and gave me a fit of he giggles, that in turn, singled me out for some choice verbal abuse from an adjacent bantamweight Scottish drill instructor.

West Kirby was typical of many training camps then in use, it had seen many thousands of recruits over the years, and it's Nissan Huts showed signs of wear and tear that all the human traffic had caused on their journeys through it. Home for the next eight weeks of purgatory was a draughty, cold and cheerless hut that was to house our intake of apprehensive youngsters. There were twenty-one of us, from a variety of backgrounds, but at that time we had one thing in common, we were all equally despised by our NCOs! The time that I had spent in the Army Cadets now stood me in good stead, and I knew how to respond to the loud shouts of command that started coming from all directions. We were marched off to collect our blankets and bed linen, and the next day marched to the station barbers. The first compulsory haircut was free, but all subsequent haircuts cost a shilling, and the order to "get your haircut" could be quite arbitrary, and totally at a whim of the NCO who had suddenly taken a dislike to your face, or your performance on the parade ground or whatever. The snag for some recruits was that you didn't always have a shilling to spare, bearing mind that pay was about three shillings a day, and pay parades were once a fortnight.

Those who were slow to respond to the constant stream of orders soon found that they were the targets of abuse, and the poor unfortunates who

were really slow to catch on were singled out for cookhouse duties and other chores, including the dreaded 'latrine duty'. In our barracks we had two or three lads who were continually the recipients of the Corporal's wrath. One of these was a young man who was obviously from a good background, and we were to subsequently discover, well educated. We discovered that his name was Nigel, and his main problem, was that he was always the last on parade, and as a result the first in line for punishment. The reason was that he could not master the intricacies of the detachable shirt collar and apparently had never come across collar and studs in his life before his National Service began. We tried to help him, but all his schooling had never prepared him for this emergency, and so, we suggested another way out of his predicament. This simply meant that until he became more adept at dressing with speed required in the mornings, that he simply went to bed at nights still clad in shirt, collar and tie. Much to the amazement of our Corporal, Nigel started appearing on parade as promptly as the rest of us, earning a break from the chores that had begun to make his life such a misery. During the eight weeks of square bashing that we lived together in our cheerless barracks, I never knew Nigel to change his shirt and collar except at weekends, when he had plenty of time to get himself dressed, fortunately, and probably because of the extreme cold, we didn't notice any body odour problems.

In our introduction to life at West Kirby, we were soon made aware of one important fact; it was that all NCOs were either Northerners or Scotsmen. They may have had their own differences, but they appeared to be united in their dislike of Southerners, and their utter hatred of anyone from the Country's Capital. This was spelt out to us in no uncertain manner during our first meeting with the senior drill instructor, a rather portly Warrant Officer. This commanding figure was probably one of the ugliest men that I was unfortunate enough to meet. At first sight he appeared to be wearing a large and discoloured false nose. He was no comedian however, as we were to discover to our cost when he barked the order; "one step forward all those from London". Almost 25% of us stepped forward. After a short silence this clownish figure snarled to us "I hate you little Bastards, you are all scum, so you had better behave yourselves. Woe betide any of you coming before me to be disciplined!". This rather set the tune for the week ahead but also made us very wary of him.

Most mothers would recognise that eighteen-year-olds are nearly always hungry, and we recruits were no exception. I had a healthy appetite, but I was of pretty small stature, and at that time weighed around 8st 6lb. The food was very basic and considering the cold weather at that time. Not sufficient in quantity and quality for many of my colleagues, some of whom were six footers, and others much stockier built than me. Those that could afford it were able to stock up with teacakes at the camp NAAFI. Those of us who were not in receipt of funds from home, had to take other steps to satisfy our hunger. We resorted to raiding the cookhouse whenever the opportunity arose, mainly stealing bread, and potatoes. The spuds we baked in the stoves in our barracks, and the bread, which was always sliced, we toasted. I remember one occasion when we smuggled some sliced bread back to our barracks, only to find that during the slicing of the loaf, that someone had managed to cut themselves. The blood had run through the loaf like letters in the middle of a stick of seaside rock. We were adaptable however, and not that fussy either, so after cutting out the worst of the stain, we toasted the rest of the bread, reasoning that the heat would kill any germs, and as I am still here to tell the story, it must have done!

Another commodity in short supply was fuel for the stoves in the barracks. This led to some ingenious scrounging, during which an outside washroom belonging to some other barrack room was partly dismantled. There were occasional weekend passes, and we would go to Liverpool for a Saturday night out, and I remember sitting on the municipal benches on the banks of the Mersey, looking across at the lights of New Brighton, whilst freezing our socks off. We were cold and worst of all, hard up. The only thing that helped me through those weeks of purgatory, was my interest in boxing. Prowess in any sport (boxing, Football, Athletics etc,) was almost guaranteed to ease your passage through the years of National Service, and luckily for me, Boxing was a popular sport in the R.A.F. Pass-out parade came none too soon for most of us, bringing to a close on a hard but traditional introduction to Service life.

Editor I was at West Kirby for my basic training 8 years later, and I will admit that it was not an easy 8 weeks, but we didn't go hungry nor cold. Perhaps someone complained to their M.P.

NAAFI Break

Meet fellow members and friends at the Branch's monthly morning coffee break.

We meet on the last Wednesday of each month at the [Letchworth Par 3 Golf Centre](#), William Way, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 2HJ at 10.00 hrs.

£2 will get you a non alcoholic drink of your choice for you to drink over good conversation.

You will also receive news of what is happening in the big world of the R.A.F. Association and, if required, how they can help you.

We look forward to seeing you.....



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association

William Richardson from Offley, Hitchin

Miss Kirsten Alexander from Chicksands

Welcome aboard





DIMPLES Bar & Cafe.

Willian Way,

Letchworth Garden City. SG6 3JH

Open Tuesday - Sunday

The home of the Branch NAAFI

BREAK



The charity that supports the RAF family

NEWS FROM THE



The RAF Association's Charity Director, Rory O'Connor, has been awarded an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours List.

Rory was given the award for his services to the Royal Air Force. A Royal Navy veteran, Rory joined the RAF Association in 2013 and has been instrumental in the growth of the charity's welfare and wellbeing services, including the

development of the Association's volunteer community, which helps support over 4,000 RAF veterans and serving personnel every year, and the introduction of new services including the RAF Association's Connections for Life service, as well as services to provide immediate financial help for those in crisis.

Under Rory's leadership the RAF Association became the first and only military charity to train all casework volunteers to an externally accredited standard.

Rory has also made a significant contribution to the wider military charity sector, serving as founding Chair of the Cobseo Safeguarding Committee and Chair of the Cobseo Casework Steering Group, where he has worked with partners from across the wider military charity sector to help improve the quality of the casework experience for beneficiaries and volunteers alike.

Rory's citation says he has devoted his working life to the military, first during his service in the Royal Navy, and latterly in his dedicated work in support of serving and veteran personnel.

The RAFAGEN is produced every quarter and sent to members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District branch of the Royal Air Forces Association via email.

If you would like to tell your story in RAFAGEN or have any comments about the magazine, the branch or the Association, we would like to hear from you. It can either be by hard copy through the mail, (any photographs will be returned immediately) to Ken Needham 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3HJ, or via email to kwn056@btinternet.com

NAAFI BREAKS for the next few months are as follows :-

Wednesday 27th August

Wednesday 24th September

Wednesday 29th October

Wednesday 26th November

No meeting during December

Should you wish not to receive the regular issues of RAFAGEN, would you please advise the branch secretary on secretary@rafa-leitchworth.org.uk, who will arrange for your address to be deleted from our list.

