

# SIX-NINETY NEWS

*The newsletter of Sedgford & District Branch – formed in 1926  
Royal British Legion: Branch 0690*

Issue 106 – August 2022



**Branch number 690 includes the villages of Brancaster, Brancaster Staithe, Choseley, Docking, Fring, Great Bircham, North and South Creake, Sedgford, Stanhoe, Thornham and Titchwell. *We also have many members from beyond these boundaries – keep coming!***

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## **THE LEGION LUNCHES CONTINUE!**

You will, of course, be aware of our August 5<sup>th</sup> arrangements for a guided tour of historic King's Lynn and lunch at Marriott's on the quay. Future lunch arrangements for this year are as shown below:

2 <sup>nd</sup> September	The Three Horseshoes, Warham
7 <sup>th</sup> October	Our AGM and lunch at Brancaster Staithe Sailing Club
4 <sup>th</sup> November	The Crown, Wells-next-the-Sea
2 <sup>nd</sup> December	The Three Horseshoes, Roydon



## **FAREWELL**

I heard recently from Steve, our standard bearer, that his predecessor in that rôle, Peter Cleland, had passed away. Peter was born in Hunstanton, but grew up and lived for most of his adult life in Sedgford; he had lived in Snettisham ever since I became membership secretary in 2006, and had latterly been living in a retirement and care complex there for several years. He was branch standard bearer when Terry and I joined the branch, and had helped Steve when he handed over the standard and the responsibilities in 2014, after about 25 years in the rôle. Peter had asked Steve to carry the branch standard at his funeral when the time came: this took place on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> July in Sedgford church, and Steve was indeed present with the standard; the branch Chairman and myself also attended along with Pam and Peter Goddard.

The church was very full, with over 100 in attendance, and the service was conducted by Rev'd Dan Tansey in the absence on holiday of our branch Chaplain. Peter had worked locally in the Sedgford area at a number of jobs until he applied to join the Navy; he was refused, apparently, on the grounds that "We need people who obey regulations"! That could have been an allusion to his driving (without a licence) a lorry into a ditch and turning it over! Instead, he joined the Parachute Regiment and served for 10 years, despite being terrified every time he jumped from an aircraft. He returned to Sedgford after leaving the Army, and after several more varied jobs, became the landlord of the Queen Victoria in Snettisham - apparently loving every minute.

The tributes paid were many and varied; many Norwich City FC supporters (and scarves, t-shirts, and more) were in evidence in the church, and he received a good send-off.



## **SECOND WORLD WAR SERVICE AT SEDGFORD**

A commemorative service will be held at Sedgeford church on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August at 11am, commemorating 80 years since 1942.



## **COINCIDENCES AND MEMORIES**

It was back in March that King's Lynn & District branch of RAFA received a communication from one of its members, Deryk Maddox, who lives in the vicinity of Stanhoe. Our paths had crossed before, in connection with the II(AC) Sqn Association, so I contacted him in my position as RAFA branch Chairman, and shortly afterwards, I received a phone call from him, so we had a chat – partly about his RAF initial pilot training - which resulted in an invitation to visit him and his wife Pat, and to borrow a book.

He had mentioned that he trained in the USA: the students were told that they would be going to Miami, which they took to be Florida, but it turned out to be Miami, Oklahoma! (No, neither did I...). The book is called "The RAF in Oklahoma", where two of the six American RAF training schools were established: one (no 6 British Flying Training School) in Ponca City, some 70 miles from Kansas and the other (no 3 BFTS) in Miami. The Miami school was attended both by Deryk, who gave me the information, and also by Raymond Baxter OBE, the famous radio broadcaster and host for many years of "Tomorrow's World": Baxter graduated from Miami to fly Spitfires, became an instructor in 1944, returning later that year to operational flying, dive bombing V-2 launch sites from Coltishall, and being mentioned in dispatches for doing so. Deryk, who celebrated his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, is presumably one of very few remaining people who graduated from there. He went on to become, among other things, Chief Flying Instructor at RAF Cranwell, and later worked for British Aerospace, selling their equipment worldwide.

In 1939, the RAF had just 35 squadrons and the Luftwaffe already had 2,000 long range bombers, and on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940 the Blitzkrieg began, with increasingly high UK casualties. In all, 300 combat fighter pilots were lost, with bomber and reconnaissance pilots re-tasked to fly fighters; then in 1940 the Battle of Britain cost many more lives. When the bombardment of London commenced, the bombing was apparently from 5.50pm until midnight every night for 57 consecutive nights: 9,000 tons of incendiary bombs were dropped. In the biggest raid, on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1941, 700 tons of bombs and incendiaries were dropped. Early in 1941, President Roosevelt convinced the US that the UK should be helped, and this gave rise to the Lend/Lease Act, promising 58% of \$25 billion worth of war materials to the UK, the rest going to France, Russia, China and elsewhere. Americans later started to join the RAF, in order to satisfy part of the Lend/Lease regulations.

As a consequence of the Battle of Britain, it was suggested in August 1940 that RAF training could be carried out in more favourable conditions than in the UK – and specifically in the states of Texas and Oklahoma – UK pilots were also trained in South Africa, Rhodesia, Canada, and elsewhere under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, because of the lack of availability of accommodation, airfields, and instructors in the UK at the time. Thus the six training bases were set up in Arizona, California, Florida, Oklahoma (2) and Texas, each taking 50 men per 20-week course.

No 3 BFTS commenced operations on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1941. All students were issued with a 'blue book' to introduce them to America – it included language, procedures, sport, and history; a similar one was issued to 'incomers' in the UK. Students, on arrival, introduced the Americans to the joys of soccer, cricket and rugby – part of the pleasure of the new lifestyle was sport, although of course sport, boxing and fitness training were also part of the course content. Other enjoyments in store for students were the lack of rationing, and the surfeit of sweets, ice cream and rich food, the lack of blackout regulations, and the pastimes like horse riding, swimming and picnics which were available to them. The cadets were given clothing, room and board, and \$60 per month spending money; their ages averaged 18-21. The cadets had just a day to settle in before their training commenced with their introduction to the Fairchild Cornell trainer; many cadets had travelled most of the 4,000 miles to Oklahoma aboard RMS Queen Mary: at the end of the course their departure was on an equally tight schedule. An example is quoted of two students who, having trained in Canada, returned home on a ship, slung below decks, on '2 hours on, 2 hours off' watch duty: they discovered that the intercom system between port and starboard enabled them to sing Christmas carols together while on watch!

Females at Miami were employed in the trades of aircraft maintenance, flight log recorders, parachute riggers, and more, including, inevitably, clerk/typists; at Ponca, there were also some of the first female Air Traffic Controllers, although it seems with relatively limited responsibilities! The trainees here again had plenty to enjoy while off duty, socialising with local families, 'clubs' and eateries, boat trips, and sightseeing flights and travels to Kansas City, Joplin, Baxter Springs, Kansas and Tulsa. Some were also treated to long trips with locals to places like Colorado. Many long term friendships, and indeed marriages, began as a consequence of the training courses, with the American residents being particularly generous to the British visitors, to the extent that many were frequently invited into residents' homes, and in fact over Christmas 1943, every British student was off camp, at the invitation of US families. One class of students repaid the hospitality and entertainment received with a murder drama performance, which was attended by 500 guests, with the proceeds split between the RAF Benevolent Fund and a Miami institution.

One graduate, from course 18 at 3 BFTS, later delivered supplies during the Berlin Airlift in 1948/9. Seeing children watching the drops, he began to drop sweets, chocolate and chewing gum, which had been saved for him by his friends, for the Berlin children. He became known locally as The Candy Bomber, and Der Schokoladen Flieger (the chocolate pilot)!

The pilots' courses consisted of ground school training, with numerous exams, allocated flying hours, including night flying and solo night landings, and later, cross country flights of around 300 miles with two students sharing the piloting on a triangular course. Instructors would switch between the two Oklahoma bases, having different skills to impart to the students. There were 15 fatal accidents at 3 BFTS, and the victims, aged between 17 and 31, are buried in line at a cemetery north of the school's location, where one local lady, Frantie Manbeck Hill, tended the graves herself for 41 years.



As each course graduated, there was a Wings parade, with the presentation of their pilots' wings to each student; this was often followed by Wings dinner/dances which were organised by the Continental Oil Company – Conoco – and which were undoubtedly much appreciated!

When course number 25 graduated in 1945, the school was finally closed; the remaining buildings were finally bulldozed in 2005. The 3 BFTS Association was formed, and held 8 reunions in the UK and 4 in the US between 1948 in London and Miami in 2005, their final meeting.

*Group photo from Oklahoma, Deryk Maddox on far left.*



## **A FALKLANDS OPERATION MEMOIR - 40 YEARS ON**

In June 2007 I was honoured to have a formal invitation to attend the Falklands 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration Ceremony at Horseguards in London. Perhaps some of you saw it on television at the time. Being there in person was very special to me.

So why was I there? I was not in the RAF during 1982; I had already completed my service. I was not one of the brave servicemen who had gone down to the South Atlantic. The reason was my civilian employment with what many still call British Aerospace: now MBDA at Stevenage. At the time I was involved with something called Sea Skua, an Air to Surface sea-skimming missile carried until last year originally by Royal Naval Lynx and later Wild Cat helicopters. In 1982 Sea Skua was not in service with the Navy, however, my company had made a number of these missiles to a production standard and trials were at an advanced stage. A technical problem had delayed the programme but the company was convinced that this had been solved, and I was lucky enough to be one of a small team that rushed this into service for the Royal Navy: the secretive plan was to get them down to the Falklands without the Argentines being aware.

The story starts with a normal Friday morning in 1982. My company's top man at the time was Admiral Sir Raymond Lygoe (an ex Ark Royal Captain) who was a superb leader for the company at the time: feared by many of his senior managers because he regularly used to slip out of his office into the shop floor areas and chat to the workers, he always found out what was really happening, which not always what his managers wanted him to hear! He decided to send a telex to a colleague in the Admiralty saying, 'would you like Sea Skua?' The answer was a simple, 'Yes please!' Starting from a few words a whole chain of unprecedented events took place to covertly rush Sea Skua into service and have a quantity taken down to the Falklands in the first warships that carried Lynx helicopters. On Friday afternoon I was summoned to the Head of Trials which was worrying at the time (what had I done wrong?). I was shown a Telex and told about the team expectations, told to organise a small team to support my specialist area, and informed that we would need to start on Sunday lunchtime for an indeterminate time. This, as expected, was to be at a MoD Range Site on the Welsh coast. I was also informed that nobody apart from my immediate manager could be told what we were doing. Finally, they asked what else I needed: I explained that I needed a large car, a hotel and money: all were promised within two hours! The only question was 'how much money did I want?' This was at the time of being given cash for expenses; how different to now! Remember that this was after three o'clock on a Friday afternoon. All were provided and I now had a wallet bulging with a very large sum of bank notes. This was a scary start to a number of weeks of amazing teamwork.

I will cut out most of a much longer story, but with many long hours of work from everyone we did succeed, and sufficient Sea Skua missiles were carried by the Task Force to the Falklands in great secrecy. Why did they need them? One worry to our military planners was that Argentina needed to supply their troops with continuing essential supplies from the mainland. Large Argentine transport planes could be Harrier or Rapier targets. Another option was for Argentina to use fast boats at night to take these supplies: we had no counter for these, as our warships would not be fast enough to stop them nipping backwards and forwards to the Falklands, so this was where Sea Skua could be tried. Prior to the Falklands crisis however, only one RN Lynx helicopter and its RN pilot had carried and test fired Sea Skua (only one having a warhead) during our development trials, so while on a break from ferrying missiles for us from Wales to Gosport he had to tell the Task Force Lynx pilots how to use Skua as they had never even seen it before! Many weeks later, after the Task Force had gone into hostilities, we were still arming and testing more Sea Skua missiles. We then received a message from our Company site saying that one night in bad weather conditions one of our warships had detected on their radar that a ship was travelling at high speed to the Falklands. A Lynx helicopter was sent out to intercept this at long range, the Lynx's radar picked up the ship, and two Sea Skua missiles were locked onto the target. The pilot could not see anything as he was out of visual range, the weather was bad and of course it was night-time. Both missiles were fired and both hit the target. It was found that both warheads had detonated: Sea Skua had worked in awful conditions at long range, and Argentina realised that we had a new weapon: we could now stop future similar supply missions, day or night. We could then also now tell our families what we were doing in Wales. I don't think this story had ever been told before, so I hope you did not mind hearing some of the background. This period of work was something that I will never forget, and I experienced what must have been the 'British war-time spirit' as everyone worked hard together with a common purpose.

So back to the June 2017 event: after an easy trip down on the train the priority was to get something to eat and drink before the commemoration ceremony so a pub was sought near to Whitehall - Alison and I struck lucky as the one I liked the look of was starting to do food in about 10 minutes. Already inside were both serving and past members of the Royal Navy who were proudly wearing their South Atlantic Medals, and it was obvious that many of them had not seen one another for a long time, so this was the also a reunion of shipmates, and it was touching to witness.

Having then made our way to Whitehall, the security for the event was, as expected, very tight, and the organisation was typically the essence of British efficiency. Our allocated seats provided a good view, and it seems that everyone was mixed up together in the seating plan: just along from us was a serving Army Air Corps Major (pilot). One key memory was the arrival of the VIPs: we saw John Major, Tony Blair and 'Doctor No' (Ian Paisley) arrive at almost the same time, followed by the Duke of York and then Margaret Thatcher. We then waited for the formal Royal entrance by The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. Another memory was that only one person was acknowledged by the crowd outside and the attendees - this was when they clapped and stood up for the arrival and departure of Margaret Thatcher.

A large TV panel was placed in Whitehall and the event was jointly conducted live via satellite with another ceremony in the San Carlos military cemetery, which came as a surprise, until I read the superb

programme saying that this was going to happen. After a fanfare, a Prologue to the Muster was given by Major Charles Carty MBE: he had been Company Sergeant Major of the Welsh Guards during the Conflict.

Before the event, holders of the South Atlantic medal had the choice of marching into Horseguards Parade or having a seat, and it was clear that many wished to march with their comrades in arms. The Tri-service Massed Bands started and with the Navy taking the lead as senior service they all proudly marched in, coming through the famous arch; those of you who have taken part in the parade in November will know this very well. When all the three services and the Merchant Navy were assembled to face the VIP stand it was impressive to see so many of the surviving heroes of the Falklands. There were 8,000 medal holders taking part. I was just a bit part player and these people had lived through the real thing, but of course we could not fail to think also about those who had lost their lives in the conflict so far away: a total of 255 British Servicemen, 3 civilians and 611 Argentines were killed in the 74 day conflict.

Lieutenant Colonel Tony Davies who is Chairman of SAMA 82 (South Atlantic Medal Holders Association) gave the official welcome from the rostrum. During the conflict he was RSM of the Welsh Guards, and he initially paid tribute to those who had given their lives - and then he surprised me by also paying tribute to all of the many dockyard, airfield, factory and other civilian workers who had worked to provide, at short notice, all the ships, aircraft and equipment which they needed to do their task successfully. Alison said, 'That's you' and I felt even more honoured to be there.

I will not list all of the order of service, but will highlight those items that I thought were the most memorable. A number of band pieces were interspersed with films on the screen. The film items were very good and one part of this took you back to the highs and lows of the events at the time, one revisiting some the original battle areas in the crags of Tumbledown Mountain. The contributions from people who had lost a husband or father were where a few tears were shed. The Duke of York also read the 'Song of the English' by Rudyard Kipling. There then followed a Drumhead Service jointly conducted between the parade in Horseguards and one in the San Carlos cemetery. The muster was brought to attention for the Last Post and Reveille, which was preceded by naval gunfire from HMS Edinburgh, positioned in San Carlos Water, which we saw live on the big screens. A wreath laying took place on the water of San Carlos with the Earl of Wessex and a widow of a Navy Chief Petty Officer accompanied by her son and daughter. The parade closed with the famous 'Sailing' song of Rod Stewart and Ark Royal TV programme fame - everyone joined in and a few more tears were shed by many. After the formal close of the service by Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, young people from the Falklands joined the parade.

After the National Anthem the VIPs and Royal participants departed, and the parade then marched off up the Mall, and at this point we were not in a position to see a unique occurrence - the Duke of York did not leave with the others, as expected. He had left the VIP stand, and nipped over to the front rank of the parade where he joined his ship-mates to proudly march with them down the Mall, and all of us as formal spectators were then encouraged to follow the parade into the Mall and wait for the Flypast. It was odd to be standing in the middle of the Mall as the crowds on either side of the road were now watching us all wander about in the road.

At 1630 we could see the dots in the sky getting very close, and as some of you may be interested in aircraft this is a list of those which made up the helicopter and fixed wing flypast:

### **Helicopters**

Three RN Sea King MK 5 took the lead including 771 NAS, which took part in the conflict.

Four Commando Sea King HC4 representing the HC4 and Wessex, which took part.

One RAF Sea King HAR 3 representing 202 Sqn Search and Rescue.

Five Lynx HAS3 representing the HAS5, which took part. To me they represented those of 815 NAS that carried Sea Skua.

Four RN Merlin MH Mk1 representing Sea King Mk5 and Wasp HAS1.

Three Lynx Mk 7 and Apache AH Mk1 representing the Commando Gazelle AH1 and the AAC Scout. One RAF Chinook HC Mk.2 of 18 Sqn. representing the original 18 Sqn. aircraft.

### **Fixed Wing**

Five Dominie T Mk.1 representing the 55 Sqn. Victor K2.

One Hercules C130J representing 24/30 Sqn.

One Hercules C130K representing 47/70 Sqn.



Five Typhoons representing Harrier 3(F)GR5's and Phantom 29 Sqn's FGR2.  
One VC 10 with RN & RAF Hawks representing the Sea Harriers and RAF GR3.  
One Nimrod MR2 representing 120/201/206 Sqns.

You may wonder why there were no real Harriers in the flypast: as a single engine jet aircraft they were not allowed to fly over central London. What about the RAF BBMF aircraft I hear you asking? The Spitfires and Hurricanes from BBMF do get special permission because they should be able to glide into the Thames in the event of an engine failure! (*Chairman's comment- Hawks also have only one engine!*)

Finally, there were the Red Arrows representing the Vulcan Black Buck missions, making a suitable ending to a special occasion of remembrance. It had been hoped that Vulcan XH 558 would be ready in time to take part in the fly past. However, I still looked forward to seeing it fly again.

### **Postscript 2007**

25 years came round very quickly for me. I had been back to work there at the Range within that year to the same place (and hotel) in Wales that I mentioned earlier. The site now had a new name and is run by QinetiQ, not the MoD. The buildings have now changed with some of the original buildings being demolished and new ones built, however, many things looked the same. 25 years is a long time though: Sea Skua was still in active service with the Royal Navy and a number of overseas countries; I was also still in service and continued to work for the same company (but now with yet another name). Both Royal Navy Sea Skua and myself would need to be retired soon!

### **Postscript 2022**

We now Remember 40 years since the start of the Falklands War. I still remember it very well. Sea Skua is now out of service with the Royal Navy, and the replacement called Sea Venom is also being produced by MBDA, and is now in service with the Royal Navy and the French Navy. The trials, I understand, were conducted in France. Vulcan XH558 did fly again and performed for many years at airshows.. I saw it flying many times, but that is also retired. I'm retired now, so perhaps I'm out of service as well?

*John Shere*

*John is also a former member of the Royal Observer Corps, having served in No 7 Group, Bedford.*



MBDA Sea Skua – also used with great success in the Iraq war, hitting 14 Iraqi Navy targets, most of which were made in Russia.



### **BRANCH SECRETARY GOES FUND RAISING**

The Branch Secretary has for many years involved himself in fund raising, with both the Army Benevolent Fund and then, when he changed uniform the RAF Benevolent Fund, for whom he raised both directly and indirectly through organising events over £40,000 earning him the Fund's 'Above and Beyond' award at their National prize giving in 2016.



Since retiring from the RAF he has continued to organise both actual running and cycling events at RAF Marham, and during lockdown, virtual events, these proving very popular and raising funds for the QE Hospital in King's Lynn, SSAFA, and the Marham Community Fund.

During the Platinum Jubilee weekend he organised a Jubilee special 10K race at Marham together with a 40K Duathlon and a children's 1K race, and the funds raised from these events exceeded £3,000.

The Platinum Jubilee event with a special commemorative medal proved so popular that it was decided to open that up to 'virtual' runners, with just under 100 signing up to take part running their own 10K events.

On a personal level and after a 2 year delay due to Covid, he signed up to take part in the iconic London to Brighton cycle ride in aid of the British Heart Foundation, this departing Clapham Common at 0630, and arriving on Brighton Seafront just under 4 hours later. With 14,000 riders taking part the route was well covered with road closures for vehicle traffic and rest stops, but the terrain being much different from Norfolk, the cycling proved quite a challenge in places.



This was followed by participation in the East Anglia's Children's Hospices charity Pier to Pier walk, taking him from Cromer Pier to Britannia Pier, Gt Yarmouth - a total distance of 33 miles along the beautiful Norfolk Coastal Path. With 170 participants, up from just 100 last year, the competition was a bit stiffer, and having been first to finish in 2021, he had to accept finishing in the first 20 albeit that the time was still nearly an hour better than last year.

The next event on the list was the Somme Poppy Run which Gary completed in July, an annual event and something that Gary first organised in 2014 raising funds for both the RBL and RAF Benevolent Fund. The event involves taking a group of runners, 16 this year, across to France to run the front line of the Battle of the Somme, from Gommecourt to the Thiepval Memorial, finishing there with a wreath laying. This was followed by a tour of the battlefields with a visit to the Canadian memorial on Vimy Ridge on the Sunday, before departing for home.

Finally, in September and after a two year break due again to Covid he will be organising the parkrun 24 hour Marathon in The Walks in King's Lynn, which involves participants running the parkrun course for a hour of their choosing between 9 am on Saturday and 9am on Sunday. All the funds raised so far from the events - this year being the 7<sup>th</sup> - go towards improvements in the Walks in King's Lynn, so far having contributed to the installation of automatic shelter screens at the café and to three new picnic benches. **THIS IS ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION OF THE REASONS FOR GARY WISHING TO MOVE ON FROM THE RÔLE, AND FOR MY REPEATED REQUESTS FOR A VOLUNTEER!**



## **TWO PIECES OF LOCAL GOOD NEWS**

I noticed in the June edition of the Hunstanton newsletter "Town and Around" that Norfolk County Council has been recognised for its outstanding support of the Armed Forces community in Norfolk, following an announcement from the Ministry of Defence. The council has been given a Gold Award, the highest honour handed out through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

The award is given to organisations which employ and support those who serve in the armed forces, service leavers, veterans and their families, with the Gold Award also acknowledging the Council's partnership working through the Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board.

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## **NORFOLK WHEELY BOAT LAUNCH**

In April, a powerboat which will enable people with disabilities to enjoy the Norfolk coastline from the water was launched at Blakeney: the bow door doubles as a ramp for wheelchair users, so the boat is

fully accessible to disabled people. "Poppy" is the country's first ever accessible powerboat, and is a product of collaboration between the Legion's Blakeney, Cley & District branch, the Norfolk Charitable Trust and the Wheelyboat Trust, a national charity which has been involved in the funding, design and supply of wheelchair accessible boats for 38 years. "Poppy" is the first to be powered by both electrical and petrol powered outboard motors.

*[www.wheelyboats.org](http://www.wheelyboats.org)*