

## Mildenhall Register AGM 12<sup>th</sup> May 2017 8pm Held at The Middleton Hall, RAF Mildenhall

- **Present:** John & Jill Gentleman, Smiley & Cherry Mildwater, Geoff & Debbie Reynolds plus veterans and guests.
- **Apologies:** Tom Payne (broken shoulder), Swifty Swallow & Martin Jenkins (Sue's son)
- **Welcome:** John welcomed everyone to the meeting and said how pleased he was to see some who had not been before or for a while.
- **Review of last AGM minutes from 2016:** The minutes were summarised by John and agreed by all. It was proposed they should be accepted by John Brooke, this was seconded by Sue Bridgwater.
- **Matters arising:** RAFA never got back to Geoff wanting stories from veterans and wanted details of addresses which they can't have as they are protected by the Data Protection Act. Something will be put in the magazine to see if anyone wants to contact them. Geoff is going to go back to the Mildenhall Museum and take more newsletters.
- **Chairman's report:** John read out the following.

As I reflect on the past year I realize once more that for the Register it has been a very active time, in not only producing the newsletter and staging the Annual Reunion, but in helping many people with enquires about their relatives' war time exploits. On this point I wish to thank all who made donations to the Register, producing the newsletter is a relatively expensive business (postage and printing) and whilst we deliver it to all on our books regardless of whether they donate or not, we do depend on a stream of money to keep it going! The Register's IT specialists are increasingly using modern communications methods to broadcast the work of the Register through the Internet and Facebook. This a convenient point to say thanks to Alan Fraser for introducing the Register's first web site some 6/7 years ago. However, Alan is not in good health and expressed a wish to stop being our web master. The web site was somewhat old and in need of an update and work has been undertaken by Debbie Reynolds (no doubt assisted by husband Geoff). The result is an independent and very modern site which Debbie wishes to take further and your committee has authorized expenditure to achieve this aim. Our very sincere thanks are due to Alan for all his hard work and efforts. Thanks also to Debbie for taking on this task, in a short time she has achieved much. She will be reporting to the meeting later. The web site has certainly expanded the knowledge of our existence around the world with enquires coming from all corners of the globe. However, I stress that you can still contact the Register's officers by more traditional methods such as letter and telephone. Our contact details are in the current newsletter.

My report is very much of thanks, giving recognition to all those who help whether directly or indirectly in the running of the Register. Our thanks are once more due to the Commander of the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW here at Mildenhall, Colonel Thomas D Torkelson, and the personnel of the USAF's 100<sup>th</sup> Refuelling Wing at RAF Mildenhall and also to the RAF commander Sqn Ldr Rick Fryer. The Base is very supportive of the Register's activities and I am sure this will continue until the Base scheduled closure by 2023. However, the local press has contained stories that this decision to close the base was being reviewed although the USAF has not confirmed this as the case.

We are very grateful to OC 622 Sqn and her personnel at RAF Brize Norton for the hospitality they display to former Squadron personnel and their wives and their keen support of the Register. It is very much appreciated and shows that the RAF is one big family; once in, you are RAF forever! On a sadder note we record the disbanding in March, of XV Sqn at Lossiemouth, whilst hoping that the Squadron, one day, will be resurrected.

My thanks are due to all who provided copy for our newsletter. Once more I was been unable to include all that was submitted due to shortage of space, (we are restricted to 44 pages by postal costs). I will endeavour to include those items excluded in the next newsletter! Our secretary Geoff does a great job in sorting your inputs before passing them on to me! Please keep the copy coming in!

The Committee has worked hard to try and ensure services provided at the Bird in Hand are up to an acceptable standard following less than favourable report on social media. I would welcome your views as to how the service was this time.

This year the date of our reunion has been brought forward one week. This was at the request of the USAF to combine some elements of the reunion with both the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 100<sup>th</sup> ARW coming to

Mildenhall and the visit of members of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, "the Bloody Hundredth", who operated out of Thorpe Abbots during WW2. This year marks the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their coming to the UK. I am sorry for any inconvenience the change may cause but I am sure the combined events will be very successful and also combining them will cut down on the work for an already busy 100<sup>th</sup> ARW. Over the weekend around 100 people will attend some aspect of the weekend. We are pleased that 8 vets of WW2 will be with us joined by 4 widows of departed members.

Tomorrow we visit the Air Radar Museum at RAF Neatishead; we leave at 0915 on the dot! I have visited and it promises to be an interesting visit albeit not as spectacular as last year's visit to Duxford. The dinner will be a joint affair to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 100th Bomber Group and the 25<sup>th</sup> of the 100ARW coming to the Mildenhall. The event is being supported by the British. The speaker will be Jonna Doolittle Hoppes, Granddaughter of the USAAF famous Gen. James Harold (Jimmy) Doolittle. The British American Committee (BAC) which was established years ago to foster Anglo American relations is supporting the event. There will be a band playing WW2 swing type music before and after the meal. Sunday's service at St John's Beck Row will start at 1045 with a wreath laying ceremony in the graveyard before the main service at 1100. The ladies of St John's will provide refreshments after the service. The RAF, RAAF and RNZAF are giving support by providing representatives at the weekend events and thanks are due to these for giving up their weekend to attend.

Thanks go to those who contribute to the day to day operations of the Register, to the Historians, in particular to Martyn Ford Jones (XV Sqn), Alan Fraser (149 Sqn plus the web site), Howard Sandall (622 Sqn) & Sam Mealing-Mills (XC Sqn). A special mention is also due to a serving RAF member Dee Boneham (The Friends of 75 Sqn and Facebook); she is very supportive and willingly undertakes any task that comes her way. Finally, there is the nerve centre of the Register, I include myself, secretary Geoff Reynolds and treasurer Smiley Mildwater, ably supported and guided by our wives, Jill, Debbie and Cherry respectively. Without these people there would not be a Register as we know it today. My very heartfelt thanks to them all!

Now as to the year ahead, I suppose the current nerve centre are prepared to carry on subject to your agreement later on. I hope the current historians will continue with their work. However, new blood would be welcome, I do stress that any volunteer needs to show actions rather words.

The date of next reunion is set for the 11th, 12th and 13th May 2018 subject to the USAF's agreement. We would welcome your input as to the programme of events. Geoff will welcome your input to the newsletter.

- **Secretary's report:** Geoff read out the following report.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, it's wonderful to welcome so many of you here once again for the 2017 reunion. A warm welcome to our first timers and those supporters who have assisted veterans to make the trip. And John and Sheena from France.

It's been a busy year since we were here last and one which has kept the committee members and our squadron historians busy. I've represented the Register at a couple of funerals during the year and I know John and Smiley have been involved in other related events. My thanks to all those who help keep this wonderful association going; John, Smiley and our ever supportive wives who put up with it all too! Also our very dedicated historians. Finally our members who support us in many ways, especially those who come along to these reunions, it makes our work worthwhile. With the recent demise of XV Squadron as an active entity, I had hoped for a report from their C/O or Squadron historian, but the Association dinner is also tonight and so neither could make the trip.

I don't want to go on too long as I'm sure we can't wait to hear our tale this year from George Thomson, a navigator with XV Squadron.

My wife also has a short item about the new website. This has been a necessity since Alan Frasers health has been in decline for some time and he felt that running the original site (for free, I might add) was becoming too onerous. With no other volunteers coming forward, Debbie and I took the decision to take up the challenge. Debbie has skills in that respect through running another site and I'm to get instruction once it is fully operational. Sadly, we can't afford to run it for free. More on that at the end.

We still have a very healthy Register, with just short of 500 members (498) on the books as at today. We have over 100 veterans registered, with an additional 34 widows. Despite the inevitable sad losses each year (20 to date this year), we continue to enrol new members from the families of past veterans and those who have found us through our excellent websites (with just over 300 visits) and Facebook page (525 likes, with numerous visits, thanks to Dee for her help with this too).

Related to the above (membership, our web presence and George's story), I've just one other thing to add. You may recall a story in this year's newsletter called Evade, Capture and Return about a XV Squadron Lancaster that was shot down during the 15th March 1944 raid to Stuttgart. Well, thanks to the mighty internet a lady contacted me in the last few weeks to say that her husband, Flt Lt Walter Blott was the pilot. He's still alive at 94, as is the W/Op Gordon Gill, but sadly in hospital recovering from a broken hip. Sophie found us by searching for her father's name on the web and it brought up the story in the electronic version of the newsletter we've uploaded to the new website. She wishes to take up membership and come to Mildenhall another year to meet with Mr Gill's son.

So, in conclusion, I'd say we have a very active and thriving Association and one that can go forward into the future in memory of all those who served us so well in the past.

- **Treasurer's report** – Smiley advised that he had forwarded donations from members of £600 towards the new slate 622 squadron badge installed in St Clement Dane's church this year. The bank accounts are in good health with total balances of £9988.70. Out of this approximately £5000 will be paid out for this year's reunion. Smiley's report stated that he could see no reason to increase the cost of reunion tickets next year.
- **Election of officers:** John asked if anyone wanted to stand as one of the officials, if not would the Register re-elect the existing officials en masse? No one wanted to step forward and so Rowley Still proposed that the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary be re-elected. This proposal was seconded by Bill Gould and agreed by all present.
- **Website update** – Debbie had put the following information on all the chairs. Some of you may be aware that over the last couple of months a new website for The Mildenhall Register has been developed. This is with the full agreement of Alan Fraser our previous webmaster who has decided to step down, due to ill health, from this area of the Mildenhall Register. I was happy to take this task over from him.

The new website can be found at [www.themildenhallregister.co.uk](http://www.themildenhallregister.co.uk) If you 'google' The Mildenhall Register, the new website is about number 5 on the search results. There have been 288 visits to the new site since it went live. At next year's AGM, I hope this will be in the thousands! The old website which was attached to Alan's Stirling Pilot site will be closed down over the next few weeks and anyone looking for information on the Mildenhall Register will be re-directed to the new site.

I would welcome any comments or feedback about the new site. Please let me know of anything you would like added. Also, if any of you finds a link to the old website when doing any research, can you please let me know (via Geoff Reynolds) so that I can contact that site and get the link changed to the new web address.

The next stage of the website development is to add photos, AGM minutes and more old newsletters. If you have any questions, please ask me!

- **The future:** John proposed that next year's reunion has the same format as this year. The Base tour is very interesting to those who never served and is a big attraction to newcomers. It is also nice to visit the Base Chapel to see the stained glass windows especially now as the Sunday service is at St John's, Beck Row. John Brooke proposed that a talk at the Saturday night dinner would be a good precedent to set. A volunteer would be needed to arrange these.
- **AOB:**
  - Geoff had contacted Methwold Church to see if it would be open this weekend. It is open from 9am to 4pm.
  - Clare More proposed a vote of thanks to the committee for all their hard work. Everyone agreed.

The meeting closed at 9.15.

**Presentation** - 'Caught Napping', the story of George Thomson's escape attempt in Germany during WW2 was read by Geoff Reynolds. It was wonderful to have George there listening to his story being read out and afterwards George told us what had happened after his re-capture.