



609 (WEST RIDING) SQUADRON R(AUX)AF ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
11.15AM 8TH JUNE 2019 THE ELVINGTON ROOM
YORKSHIRE AIR MUSEUM ELVINGTON YORK

PRESENT

Wg Cdr J Metcalfe, Sqn Ldr M Ashe, Cpl S Wright, Adele Hudson, Paul Gallagher, Julie Gallagher, David Darley, Rosemary Darley, Paul Meakin, Tom Overton, Graham Carroll, Pamela Carroll, Darren Webster, Hilary Wall, Ursula Granahan, Marcia Gadd, Elizabeth Hewick, Philip Proudley, Mike Foster, Dave Fielding, S Voase, Ken Hobbs, Jean Hobbs, Derek Weathergill, Alan Parkes, Peter Blaney.

APOLOGIES

Air Cdr S Bostock, Sqn Ldr A Hall, Cpl S McGhin, Hugh Mulligan, Rosemary Lloyd, Norman Monahan, Brian Waite, Jason Macleod, David Bage, Jean Graham, Paul McVitie, John Carruthers, John Matley, Des Robinson, Alison Robinson.

1 Absent Friends

The meeting was opened by the Chairman, Wg Cdr Metcalfe, with a Minute's Silence to remember Absent Friends:

- Doreen Marshall
- Albert Laforce
- Jimmy Stewart

2 Apologies for Absence

The apologies for absence were noted as above.

3 Minutes of the Meeting on 16th June 2018

The Minutes of the Meeting on 16th June 2018 had been circulated and were approved.

Proposed: Alan Parkes

Seconded: David Darley

4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5 Chairman's Report

The Future of the Association

Two years ago the Chairman had expressed concerns about the future of the Association. Last year he felt that things had improved a little. About six weeks ago he had sent out a letter to all Members to promote dialogue and discussion about the future.

Two years ago the Association Facebook page had 34 followers. Now there were 174. The usage of the Twitter account was more difficult to pin down. The Newsletter was now digital and this had been quite successful, but last December an RAF100 Special Issue had been produced but there had not been a single comment in feedback (good or bad) for this which invited the question as to whether it was worth the money to produce.

Al Hayman had updated the website.

All of this had been designed to attract new younger Members and to counter the current declining Membership due to age. It had been hoped that current Squadron members would be interested but this was proving difficult, if not impossible. Sqn Ldr Ashe was doing well in promoting the history of the Squadron at HQ but it was hard to sell to the younger generation.

In spite of all this activity in the past two years, no new Members had joined the Association.

Lunch numbers for today were the lowest ever and the Chairman would be standing down at the end of the meeting.

It was time for a new vision and new ideas, and a radical rethink of how the Association is run. Would this be the last AGM? This format is old-fashioned and younger generations don't want to work like this.

Membership of the Association on paper is c.120 but responses from the Membership (when requested in answer to questions etc) never numbered more than 20 and criticism was not always constructive.

The Association would not be disbanding, but it needed to continue in a different guise to cater for changing times and different expectations. Current Squadron members seem to

think that you join the Association when you retire from serving and a succession plan has not developed as the Chairman hoped it would.

This topic would be discussed in more depth later in the meeting (see below).

The Memorial Room at the Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington

Last year it had been decided to update this to appeal to a younger age group, on the advice of the Museum's management, who had noted that the display needed to be interactive in order to engage with a digital generation of visitors.

The room is to be refurbished with £20,000 being donated by a benefactor and £20,000 being spent by the Museum. Paul McVitie is project managing on behalf of the Association and in consultation with the Museum.

The work will be undertaken in the autumn of 2019 when the Museum closes for the winter and should be open in the spring / summer of 2020.

The Belgian Branch of the Association

The Chairman had been to Normandy to the Crepon Memorial to 349, 350 and 609 Sqns unveiling, accompanied by Flt Lt Roylance (Adjutant 609 Squadron) recently. 609 Sqn had 55 Belgian pilots (out of a total of 1200 in the RAF). The event was attended by the General of the Belgian AF as well as Conrad, Boomer, Kurt and many Belgian friends.

The Belgian Members were very keen indeed on the Squadron and Association links and treasured the shared history more than their UK counterparts, possibly due to the fact that Belgium had been an occupied territory during WWII. During the Chairman's stay there were many discussions about the future of the Association.

The Typhoon Recovery Project, Alblasterdam, Rotterdam

A 609 Typhoon flown by Belgian Pilot Flt Lt Jan Van Daele has been found just outside Rotterdam. The Belgian and Dutch governments are undertaking a joint project to excavate the aircraft and to commemorate Flt Lt Van Daele who lost his life in the crash and is buried nearby.

Archive

Conrad wants to set up an archive in Belgium and to make the information available on line. The archive needs to be available, but at a small fee to cover costs and to provide an income for the Association, and to stop the information being taken and used for profit by professionals.

Events

The Stoop lunch had taken place in October 2018 as usual.

The Remembrance Service had taken place at Leeds Bradford Airport in November 2018 attended by serving members of the Squadron and Association Members. The new CEO of LBA was very supportive and wants to continue the involvement.

Dates for your Diary

28th September 2019 event to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the crash of the 609 Typhoon in Alblasserdam (Holland) – invitations will be sent out shortly

5th & 6th October 2019 Tally Ho Weekend in Ussel (Belgium) – information to follow

9th October 2019 National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire: All Reserve Squadrons and Associations are invited to celebrate the 95th Anniversary of the formation of the R(Aux)AF in 1924 – let Wg Cdr Metcalfe know if you will be attending

30th October 2019 Remembrance Service at Leeds Bradford Airport

6 Secretary's Report

Adele Hudson read the Secretary's report in the absence of Cpl McGhin, away on a residential promotion course at RAF Halton for her new job in central London.

As usual, Cpl McGhin has continued to receive and assist with postal and electronic requests for information on the Squadron or previous serving personnel. With the help of our archive genius, Mark Crame, we help to build a better picture of Squadron history. This year, requests have included:

- Lt Maurice Choron (French pilot, close friend of Wg Cdr M Robinson)
- Roger Burgess (Sept 1940); mentioned in Frank Zeigler's book in connection with the construction of the facilities at Yeadon

Unfortunately, this year we've had a slow response and much less interest in the AGM and the Association in general.

Cpl McGhin was thanked by the Chairman for being Secretary at the same time as undertaking full-time service in the RAF.

7 Treasurer's Report

Rosemary Darley reported that 2018 had been reasonably quiet financially. The main expenditure was the design and production of the newsletter which amounted to £800. In the main, this was distributed by e-mail but a number have to be printed and posted either because Members do not have e-mail, or the e-mail addresses were rejected.

There had also been an increase in costs for postage and stationery to advertise the AGM and Lunch, and the Normandy trip in June 2019.

The Association subsidised the 2018 lunch by £238.50.

The 2018 figures have been inflated by the receipts and payments in respect of the Normandy trip as these all passed through the Association bank account. The total cost of the Normandy trip will be £12,000 but this is self-financing and no subsidy is being given from the Association.

The number of subscriptions had decreased, through resignations and non-renewals.

The Chairman commented that expenses were due to Members for the purchase of Squadron memorabilia to use as gifts for influential supporters, for example, senior Belgian officers.

The total income for 2018 was £4086.10. The total expenditure was £4777.13. The deficit was £691.03. The cash at bank at the year-end was £7093.27.

8 Belgian Branch Report

David Darley presented Conrad Roumieux's report on behalf of the Belgian supporters.

The branch is still growing and has had a very busy and active year. The enthusiasm on the Belgian side of the Channel continues to be amazing.

This year (2019) is a special year as it marks the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Belgium in WWII.

In July 2018 the annual Ursel Avia was held and 609 was in the spotlight twice:

- The memorial B-67 (the old landing strip that was used for the Liberation of Walcheren)
- *The Merlins* – a re-enactment group who bring 609's wartime activities to life

On 14th October 2018 the Branch was present at the Belgian Air Force Remembrance day in Brussels where they put down a roundel and flowers at the monument that carries the names of the Belgian 609 Sqn pilots who lost their lives in battle. We will be attending this year's event again as we are now officially part of, and recognised by, the Belgian Air Force Association.

On 29th October 2018 at Ursel, B-67 was on the agenda as it was from there that 609 Sqn operated in Belgium.

In Belgium, Holland and France, the Association is growing and is recognised as the highest scoring Typhoon Squadron. It is a sign of deep respect for our pilots, for our heritage and towards the Squadron today that we do all we can to keep the memory alive.

We feel that we need to create an updated and modernised Association that draws the attention of younger age groups, families and the wider community who would love to know more about the Squadron's history.

9 The Future of the Association

The Chairman introduced a discussion about the future of the Association. The Belgian Branch had made a number of suggestions about how the Association could develop in the future. They need the credibility of a UK Association to support the Belgian Branch.

The Association will not be disbanding but needs a new way forward.

The Chairman said that he had served for 10 years and now wished to stand down. Unfortunately, no-one had come forward to be Chairman in his place. In the past, the Chairman's post was largely a figurehead, but it was now a busy commitment with people, events, communications and committee business.

Rosemary Darley also wished to stand down as Treasurer and Des Robinson had come forward to take over.

The Chairman introduced the following points for discussion / consideration:

- Being Chairman is a problem for anyone who also has a full-time job, but we need to attract someone from the younger generation – who almost all have full-time jobs
- How are we going to continue the Association?

The following suggestions were made and discussed:

- Instead of a Chairman, have a committee – this has worked in other organisations, but the scope has to be on a more limited basis than if there is a single Chairman
- Broaden the membership to anyone with an interest in RAF history – no longer any need for direct connection with 609, and have a single level of subscription for all
- Open up the Membership because if it continues to be closed then the Association will eventually fold
- Problem with restriction on distribution of Facebook posts unless you pay to have them boosted i.e. distributed to everyone in the group
- Any new Chairman needs to have time
- Work much more closely with the Belgian Branch
- Have an international newsletter
- 609 to hold the copyright of all information on the website and a fee is required to access information and photos
- Cost of boosting Facebook posts to be investigated
- Somebody needs to take ownership of ideas and take them forward
- Who should Membership be opened up to?
- How do we go about attracting new Members – 'new' 609 has no connection with historic aircraft in spite of all the OC's best efforts
- 1998 – 2004 is the cut-off point – after that the flying connection is lost as the Squadron becomes entirely Regiment
- 1998 – 2004 are the critical generation to attract
- Getting people to join/take part/join committees is very hard and many organisations – even national ones e.g. National Trust and English Heritage, are struggling to find volunteers

- The 609 Twitter feed has 15 followers and a total of 31 tweets – so its influence is currently negligible
- What is the point and purpose of the Association?
- Younger people (in the UK at least) are not interested in history, they are interested in people and in keeping in touch with people
- Is the Association to remember old times or is it to share current news and communications?
- There is a vibrancy in the Belgian Branch that could help to reinvigorate the Association
- We need to change course
- What is the point of the AGM?
- Could the Belgian Branch take the lead for a while?
- The Chairman doesn't need to be an Officer but DOES need:
 - Drive
 - Enthusiasm
 - Grasp of modern technology and communications
 - Knowledge of history
 - A wish to do the job
- Running the Association in its present form is bureaucratic and an administrative burden. That should be taken away so that the focus can be on communications instead
- The GDPR (Data Protection) rules need to be followed which means that contact details for potential new Members must not be exchanged with the Association without the consent of the individual concerned
- The older generation needs to relinquish control, but equally the younger generation needs to take up the baton
- 607 Sqn Association has folded and similar organisations are all suffering similar issues e.g. RAF Regt Association, RAFA

• **On 20th July 2019 the Squadron is holding a reunion and BBQ at Bedale Athletic & Sports Association to which all Association Members are cordially invited. This could be an Association recruitment opportunity as currently 100+ serving members and their families are booked to attend. Flt Sgts Hughes and Rose are organising and information will be sent to Cpl McGhin for circulation. The OC offered support with the provision of a 'recruiting tent' for the Association but said that promotional materials would be needed to make the tent look attractive and welcoming**

• **The Association needs a Communications and PR team – volunteers are urgently needed**

• **These Minutes to be sent out to all Members ASAP to invite their comments, views and offers of help**

10 Election of Officers and Committee

Chairman: Vacant

Treasurer: Des Robinson

Proposed: Chairman

Seconded: Sqn Ldr Ashe

Newsletter (pending possible reorganisation): Adele Hudson

Proposed: Chairman

Seconded: Darren Webster

Secretary (pending formal request from Wg Cdr Metcalfe): Cpl Sarah McGhin

Proposed: Chairman

Seconded: Adele Hudson

Website: Vacant, pending new Communications Strategy

Creation of new Post: PR & Communications Manager: to be advertised around the Membership – doesn't have to be one person, could be several people – **Volunteers Please!**

Proposed: Rosemary Darley

Seconded: Chairman

11 Any Other Business

Rosemary Darley

Alan Parkes proposed a vote of thanks to Rosemary Darley on relinquishing the post of Treasurer and thanked her for her sterling work. She had done a fantastic job as Treasurer and everyone in the Association wished her all the best for the future.

Wg Cdr Metcalfe

David Darley made a presentation of books to Wg Cdr Metcalfe thanking him for 10 years of loyal and dedicated service to the Association. He emphasised that this was the beginning of a new phase for the Association.

John Matley

A vote of thanks was given to John Matley for his significant contribution to the Association over very many years, especially the annual Remembrance Ceremony at Leeds Bradford Airport. He has done the Association proud.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.10pm.

Annual Association Lunch

After lunch, David Darley, President, presented the Alec Ingle trophy to Cpl Sid Wright, who gave a short talk on his experiences hosting an exchange with American counterparts in the UK, when he organised for the party to attend the famous and historic nightly Ceremony of the Keys in the Tower of London, and then of his return visit to America which entailed helping civilians after the recent hurricane.

OC 609 Sqn, Sqn Ldr Merv Ashe, also gave a short talk on current and future Squadron events and the new History Timeline in HQ. **He emphasised that all Association Members were always welcome to call at Leeming to see the new exhibition and to meet current Squadron members.**

Adele L Hudson
Acting Association Secretary
10th June 2019