

ON THE RADAR

SUPPORTING FORMER AND SERVING MEMBERS OF THE RAF AND THEIR FAMILIES.



VETERANS GATHER TO REMEMBER

We brought together some of the last remaining Second World War veterans at Biggin Hill Airport to mark Battle of Britain Day, giving them the chance to meet new people and reminisce.

Veterans gathered with our Community Engagement Workers and other RAF Family members to reminisce and share stories over some cake. It was a wonderful opportunity to sit down together, hear what Battle of Britain Day means to them, and for the veterans to enjoy an interesting day out, helping them feel less isolated.

Attendees also had the chance to explore the Fund's Strongest Link Garden, which moved to Biggin Hill after the 2022 Chelsea Flower Show. Funded by Project Giving Back, the garden pays tribute to Battle of Britain veterans.

One of our Community Engagement Workers, Lisa, who attended the day said, "being able to get veterans together as a group is something special. Hearing them say it's not only made their day but made their year, makes it all worthwhile."

Could our Community Engagement Workers help you?

Our Community Engagement Workers can help you by finding local activities and groups to feel less lonely as we come into the new year.

Visit rafbf.org/connections for more information or call **0300 102 1919**.



CALL: 0300 102 1919



EMAIL: welfare Navigators@rafbf.org.uk

- ✓ EMOTIONAL WELLBEING
- ✓ FRIENDSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS
- ✓ FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS

- ✓ INDEPENDENT LIVING
- ✓ FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

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MARGARET'S STORY

Women's Auxiliary Air Force veteran, Margaret, was a Meteorologist and part of 5 Group Bomber Command during the Second World War.

She spent gruelling 24-hour shifts in control towers, witnessed aircraft accidents, and narrowly escaped when an aircraft's engine detached and almost hit her. Margaret recounts a daring bicycle ride across a fog-covered runway...

"One evening I was coming back from a bicycle ride with a friend. I said, 'Let's go across the runway', which was absolutely illegal. Because it was very thick fog, from my superior knowledge, it was a red alert, so nobody was going to take off or land," she recalls.

"Halfway across, an irate chap came rushing down the runway saying, 'Get off, we're expecting a plane with a VIP doing an emergency landing.'

"I don't know who was in it, but it could have been Churchill because he was quite likely to come up and visit. He and I might have been killed and the war could have been quite different!"

Explaining why Remembrance is so important, Margaret says: "You've got to remember how many

people lost their lives. It's incredible when you look back. I don't think in everyday life you think about it very much – but you should."

Dementia support

We supported Margaret when her husband was diagnosed with dementia. If you or a loved one is affected by the condition, you may be interested in our Dementia Reminiscence groups, which allow RAF Family members with dementia to share life experiences, memories and stories from the past.

Call **0300 102 1919** to find out if there is a group in your area.



FIVE CHRISTMAS WELLBEING TIPS

With Christmas fast approaching, here are some top tips to try to stay well physically and mentally this festive season.

1. If you can, keep active by dedicating a few minutes each day to gentle exercises or a brisk walk.
2. Consider volunteering to help others.
3. Take care of yourself by doing things you find enjoyable and relaxing, like hobbies or reading.
4. Stay connected with your loved ones by meeting up, or through phone calls or online.
5. Set achievable new year's resolutions, and let your friends and family know what they are so they can keep you accountable! Why not focus on your physical health, mental wellbeing or pursuing a new passion?

From everyone at the RAF Benevolent Fund, we wish you a happy and healthy festive season.

QUIZ

Give our quiz a go and see how well you know your RAF!

1. How many aircraft does the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight operate?
2. Who founded the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund in 1919? Hugh Grant, Hugh Trenchard, Hugh Dowding or Hugh Laurie
3. What is the name of the Central Church of the RAF where the Fund usually hosts its Carol Concert?
4. What year did the RAF Benevolent Fund start the Christmas Tree of Light?
5. Which of these British actors served in the RAF?
Bob Hoskins, Rex Harrison, Sid James, Stewart Granger

1. 12, 2. Hugh Trenchard, 3. St Clement Danes, 4. 2020, 5. Rex Harrison

HELP WITH BENEFITS

Are you receiving all the support you're entitled to?

With the cost-of-living crisis ongoing, and winter taking hold, it's important to make sure you're claiming all possible benefits.

Receiving certain benefits can also make you eligible for further government support.

For example, if you're getting some means-tested benefits, such as Pension Credit, you should be entitled to the government's cost-of-living payment of £299 in spring 2024.

Everyone who was born before 25 September 1957 and lived in the UK during 18-24 September 2023 should also get a Winter Fuel Payment this year. In 2023, the payment should include an extra £150 or £300 cost-of-living payment.

Our Benefits Advice Service can check to make sure you aren't missing out on any benefits. Contact us on **0300 102 1919** or advice@rafbf.org.uk.

You can also read our booklet on maximising your income at rafbf.org/advice.

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In October we marked Black History Month and paid tribute to our diverse RAF Family by sharing some of their stories.

We spoke to RAF veteran Sergeant Leroy Francis about what Black History Month means to him. He explained: "Black History Month is a very important period.

"It gives me the opportunity to remember the sacrifices made by my parents when they moved to England which has led to the opportunities that I have had in life to date.

"It also gives us the chance to celebrate the efforts of serving and veteran personnel in the Armed Forces and ensure they are equally recognised for their contribution to our Forces in all corners of the world."

Supporting Leroy

We were there for Leroy when he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, providing everything from a stairlift, recliner armchair and bed to support with his care needs. We also helped Leroy convert his bathroom into a wet room.

If you need similar support, please visit our website: rafbf.org/help

It gives me the opportunity to remember the sacrifices made by my parents." - Leroy Francis



"I MAY BE 102 YEARS OLD BUT I WANT TO DO MY BIT AND RAISE MONEY"

Former Flight Lieutenant Colin Bell completed extraordinary challenges for the Fund.

Born in 1921, former Mosquito Bomber pilot Colin, joined the RAF in 1940. Despite his age at 102, he went to extraordinary lengths to raise funds for charity.

Colin did a sponsored walk over three days in August, retracing significant locations from his Second World War service, including RAF Wyton, RAF Downham Market, Bexwell Church, and the VCs Memorial.

On top of that, Colin abseiled 17 storeys (280ft) down the Royal London Hospital, the highest elevated helipad in Europe. Colin was awarded the Guinness World Record for oldest-ever participant in an abseil! Thank you Colin!



WORD SEARCH

S A M T S I R H C Q S I
 U Y Y S F E E T O C B L
 P H U F E I M P M X B L
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CHRISTMAS
SUPPORTING
BRAVE

CAROL
COMMEMORATE
ILLUMINATE

REMEMBRANCE
FAMILY
TREE

CHRISTMAS TREE OF LIGHT

Shine a light on the RAF Family

Over Christmas, we reflect on cherished memories and remember those we have loved.

This winter, we invite you to dedicate a light on our virtual Christmas tree to remember a loved one and express gratitude for the service and commitment of those in our RAF Family. By giving to our Christmas Tree of Light, you can share your memories and thoughts, along with a picture, to the world.

Your support is sincerely appreciated and will help us to provide comfort to other members of the RAF Family in need of support.

Dedicate a light: rafbf.org/light

To read previous editions
visit: rafbf.org/ontheradar



**Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund**