

ON THE RADAR

KEEPING YOU UP TO DATE WITH THE RAF BENEVOLENT FUND



Welcome to On the Radar

A warm welcome to our latest newsletter, full of updates and information about how we can support you through any tough times ahead.

As the days get cooler and the sun sets earlier, we want to remind our RAF Family that we are here to provide practical, emotional and financial assistance throughout the Autumn months.

In this edition of *On The Radar*, you can read all about how our support can improve the wellbeing of our RAF Family. Check out our top tips for looking after your mental health, read how we provided tools for an RAF veteran to manage his Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD); and learn how we support those with dementia to feel less alone.

We also look back at the sacrifices made by the RAF to mark Battle of Britain Day, and share a fun-filled fundraiser which brought the RAF Family together in colour this summer.



If you or someone else you know needs our support, call **0300 102 1919** or email welfarenavigators@rafbf.org.uk

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

- ✓ INDEPENDENT LIVING
- ✓ FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

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**“The Fund helped me
manage my OCD”**

To mark OCD Awareness Week this October (13-19), we spoke to RAF veteran Andrew Stevens about the support he has received from us to help him better manage his condition.

Andrew Stevens joined the RAF when he was 18 years old, serving for seven years as a painter and finisher on Tornados based at RAF Lossiemouth. He loved his job in the military and being part of a tight community and a brotherhood. But, in 2007, his career was unexpectedly cut short, and Andrew struggled with the transition into civilian life.

Despite being successful in finding a civilian job, he became anxious and depressed and quickly things spiralled out of control. He began to worry about everything – finances, family, his new job, his home. Eventually, that worry turned into compulsion.

For ten years, Andrew struggled with severe OCD, a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours.

“I started obsessing about everything that could go wrong. I would come home, do my routines – my handwashing, my showers, my food – and I wasn’t really communicating with anyone. It was exhausting.

“When I got home, I wouldn’t go near my children. I know it sounds crazy, but I couldn’t risk touching them. This went on for ten years.”

However, there was light at the end of the tunnel for Andrew, when he reached out to us for emotional support. He said: “The Fund’s early and reactive

support meant I didn’t have to ask myself these questions for very long and slowly the darkness lifted. The Listening and Counselling Service they provided saved my life.”

Andrew credits the support from his wife Claire and three sons for helping him through the tough times. He said: “I wouldn’t be where I am without Claire’s help, she was loyal and very patient.”

Andrew is now thriving in a less stressful job working part-time and enjoys volunteering in his free time. He said: “I volunteer with the Air Cadets, training them as part of the fieldcraft team and I love it; that is my passion. The OCD is always going to be there. But the difference now is how I manage it to make sure it doesn’t spiral.”

Need support with your mental health? Get in touch with our welfare team by calling us on **0300 102 1919, emailing **welfare Navigators@rafbf.org.uk** or visit **rafbf.org/wellbeing** for more information**

Battle of Britain

Remembering those who made the ultimate sacrifice 84 years ago

The Battle of Britain was a defining moment for the RAF during the Second World War. Using science, originality, and support from across the UK and overseas, the RAF defended the UK from Nazi Germany's air force, the Luftwaffe. It was the first major battle fought entirely in the air, and Nazi Germany's first major military defeat.

Over the years, we have spoken with many RAF veterans who played a vital part in the Battle of Britain, including:

John 'Paddy' Hemingway, the last surviving Battle of Britain pilot

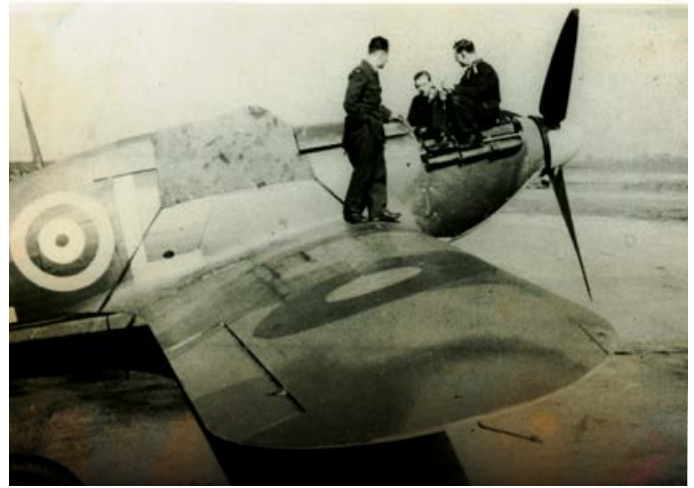
John, now 105, joined the RAF in 1938. In August 1940, during hectic dogfights, John was twice forced to bail out of his Hurricanes, landing once in the sea off the Essex coast and in marshland on the other occasion. John was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) on 1 July 1941.

He said in an interview with the Fund: "The sacrifice of my fellow pilots, ground crews and all who supported the effort during the Second World War should never be forgotten."

Stan Hartill

Stan Hartill, who passed away in 2020, was a member of the ground crew who helped keep the Spitfires flying during the Battle of Britain. Stan was 19 years old when he joined the RAF with 609 Squadron.

In an interview a few years ago, Stan recalled: "The ground crew felt we had a very important part to play in the Battle of Britain because our job was



to keep the Spits flying and without the Spits, the pilots were, of course, useless. We would start very early, sometimes at 7am and just carry on, catching a bit of sleep when we could."

We were only too proud to support Stan in his later years when he was struggling to pay an increase in the maintenance charge on his flat and run his car, which due to his declining health, was essential.



Stan Hartill

Quiz

Give our quiz a go and see how well you know the Battle of Britain

1. What was the codename for the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944?
2. What was the name of the carrier pigeon who delivered the first reports of the Normandy landings to an RAF base on Thorney Island?
3. The air battle between the German Luftwaffe and the British Royal Air Force, deemed 'The Hardest Day' was fought on which date during the Battle of Britain?
4. What was the average age of a pilot in the Battle of Britain?
5. What was the name of the early radar system built along the British coastline and used during the Second World War?

1. Operation Overlord, 2. Gustav, 3. 18 August 1940, 4. 20.5. Chain Home

Top tips to take care of your mental health

We're here to support all members of the RAF Family who may be experiencing difficulties with their mental health - from anxiety and low mood, to loneliness and isolation.

Check out our top tips to keeping your mental health in check.

Relax your mind

Practising mindfulness has been shown to have a positive impact on mood and mental wellbeing – increasing levels of happiness and reducing levels of stress and anxiety. We provide a free subscription to the Headspace app for all serving RAF personnel, their partners, and members of the RAF Family who use our Listening and Counselling Service.

Headspace is a useful digital tool which helps with practising mindfulness and meditation to reduce stress, anxiety, and aid better sleep. Research has shown that people begin to experience the benefits of mindfulness after using the app for just ten minutes a day for ten days.

Look after your physical health

Looking after physical health is immensely beneficial for mental wellbeing because of the close relationship between the body and mind. Regular exercise releases endorphins which are natural mood lifters and help to reduce stress and anxiety.

Taking care of physical health fosters a sense of accomplishment and boosts self-esteem, which can enhance overall mental wellness. Why not get involved with one of our fundraising challenges and put your physical health to the test, while also raising money for an important cause?



Take a short break away

Taking a short break away can have significant mental health benefits, providing a much-needed respite from the stresses and routines of daily life. Holidays offer a chance to disconnect from work and responsibilities, allowing you to unwind and recharge mentally.

We provide a selection of subsidised breaks for serving families at a number of locations countrywide, to help provide a much-needed break away from the pressures of military life. We also offer Group Friendship Breaks for our veteran community twice a year across various locations.



Find out about the wellbeing support we provide at rafbf.org/getsupport



RAF stations host Colour Run events for the Fund

This summer, we worked with RAF stations across the country to introduce a new series of Colour Run fundraisers, with the first held at RAF Cranwell, Lincolnshire.

Back in June, RAF Cranwell hosted the first Colour Run and brought together serving personnel, veterans and their families, as well as community members, for a day filled with fun and fitness.

Participants of all ages took part in the 5K fun run, which featured five powder stations along the route where volunteers doused runners in brightly coloured powder. The course took the runners through the historic grounds of RAF Cranwell and at the finish line, they were greeted with live music, and friends and family cheering them on.

Holly Youd, our Community Fundraiser for Central, North England and Wales said: "The Colour Run was an amazing day to bring the RAF Family together, along with the other forces, for a fun-filled afternoon. We would love for you to join us at our future Colour Run events across stations, where your fundraising efforts will go a long way in ensuring we can be there to support the RAF Family for years to come."

The Colour Runs continued throughout August and September at RAF Leeming, RAF Coningsby and RAF Wittering.

Find out more about our fundraising events and how to get involved at rafbg.org/get-involved

Need help writing your Will?

Free Will Writing Services for the RAF Family

Over 60% of our income comes from gifts in Wills, allowing us to provide lifelong support to serving and ex-serving RAF personnel and their families. Without this vital funding we would be unable to carry out our life-changing work. We have partnered with two services to help you write or update your Will for free:

- Farewill can be found at farewill.com/rafbf-support or you can call **020 4538 2378** and ask for a call back.
- National Free Wills Network is reached by emailing legacies@rafbf.org.uk or calling **0300 102 1919** and we will refer you to a solicitor in your area.

For more information, and to find out which service may be best for you, please contact our friendly Gifts in Wills team on **0300 102 1919** or email legacies@rafbf.org.uk.



World Alzheimer's Day

Taking part in our D-Day Aeroplane Challenge

We're here to support members of the RAF Family with memory loss

World Alzheimer's Day, marked globally on 21 September, is a day to raise awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Our Dementia Reminiscence Groups are one of the ways we are helping those with lived experiences of dementia and memory loss to come together.

Our Dementia Reminiscence Groups allow members of the RAF Family with dementia to share life experiences, memories and stories from the past, providing a sense of competence and confidence by recalling these memorable moments.

In 2023, we received a generous grant of £82,000 from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to expand our Dementia Reminiscence groups project over three years.

The groups, run by our Community Engagement Workers, help to reduce social isolation and the associated risk factors such as dementia and physical frailty in vulnerable members of the RAF Family, and increase overall wellbeing. Groups are currently held in Cambridgeshire, Grantham, Maidstone, Newmarket and Norwich.

Terry and Peggy Burdett are regular attendees of the group based at the Norris Museum in

Cambridgeshire. Terry said: "I struggle with dementia and need prompting by my wife constantly. I forget things when I'm speaking, and she fills in the gaps for me. I forget words, where I live and, more upsettingly, the names of my children. It's scary. The group has made me feel welcome and is a safe place for my wife and I to speak and meet with people."

Declan Geraghty, our Community Engagement Manager, said: "We started to notice more and more people that we were working with had memory loss, both diagnosed and undiagnosed. The idea was to put together some groups that would allow members of the RAF Family to meet, form connections and build friendships."

Do you have, or know anyone with memory loss? Find out how we can help by emailing welfare Navigators@rafbf.org.uk or calling **0300 102 1919**

To read previous editions visit:
rafbf.org/ontheradar

RAF Benevolent Fund is a registered charity in England and Wales (1081009) and Scotland (SCO38109)



**Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund**