



## Update to Supporting Trusts Autumn 2017

### Remembrance: The Siege of Malta

For Remembrance this year, the RAF Benevolent Fund has highlighted the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Siege of Malta. Despite being one of the smallest countries in Europe, Malta endured some of the fiercest fighting of the Second World War, from 1940-42, owing to its strategic location on the main supply lines to North Africa and the Suez Canal.

On Wednesday 4 October, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales attended a special event in Malta to commemorate the anniversary of the nation being honoured with the George Cross, for its heroism during the Second World War.

Prince Charles' grandfather King George VI awarded the people of Malta the gallantry medal, normally presented to individuals, for enduring years of bombing that left many on the brink of starvation.

In the capital Valletta, Prince Charles, who is president of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association, joined Malta's Prime Minister, Joseph Muscat, Second World War veterans, civilians and their families for a special evening ceremony.



Squadron Leader Allan Scott DFM, who was one of the many RAF pilots who took to the skies daily to defend the island, its people and the essential convoys, returned to the island for the first time in 75 years to attend the event (pictured above).

Allan flew his Spitfire off HMS Eagle to the island on 21 July 1942. Initially posted to 603 Squadron, shortly after he arrived he was transferred to 1435 Squadron. Here he saw much action – including a victory during Operation Pedestal on 13 August.

Speaking at the event, The Prince of Wales said: "I am deeply honoured to be able to share this very special anniversary with you all. The George Cross that proudly adorns your flag will forever bare testament to Malta's essential strength of character.

"What is more, it serves as a symbol of the profound gratitude that all of us in the United Kingdom and across the Commonwealth feel for the sacrifice that Malta made and to the enduring friendship we enjoy with the people of these ancient isles."

## Support Serving Personnel on Stations

The RAF Benevolent Fund prides itself on meeting the needs of the RAF's serving families, whether on the front line or at home. We offer a range of welfare support to serving families including CAB outreach, youth support through Airplay and Ben Clubs, Relationship support, grants to individuals in their time of need and support to stations for community and family initiatives.



One such grant was awarded to RAF Shawbury to fund a new play park on the base to be enjoyed by all the families on the station. The new layout has been designed for children of all ages, replacing one which only catered for toddlers. It was created in consultation with the young people at RAF Shawbury. This was to ensure that the park would let them have fun, learn new skills, interact with other children and increase physical fitness.

Mrs Gail Moore, Community Development Officer at RAF Shawbury, said: "The unveiling of this park was the result of a great team effort by Proludic, CarillionAmey and the RAF Benevolent Fund. It will make a huge difference to the children who will now have a safe and stimulating environment to play in. We are especially grateful to the RAF Benevolent Fund for making this possible."

Mark Quinn, RAFBF Regional Director, said: "To be able to provide funding for this play park and see the smiles on the faces of the children has been wonderful. The RAF Benevolent Fund is very proud to support serving personnel and their dependants and I very much hope this facility will be enjoyed by many for years to come."

In 2016 we spent over £3 million supporting serving families, providing support in the areas where there is need, like the play park at Shawbury. We are currently seeking support for four play parks at RAF Valley in Wales which are in desperate need of refurbishment. The refurbishment is costing an estimated £140K, with a current fundraising shortfall of £88K.

All four play parks have reached the end of their productive use, with the contractor having gradually removed equipment that is deemed to be unsafe, without replacing it as per contract. The upgrade of the parks has been on RAF Valley's ongoing, top 10 welfare funding requirements list to the RAF (via the annual Community Needs Analysis), since 2015.

The refurbished play parks will be enjoyed by around 200 children of the serving couples at RAF Valley. Additionally, all the children of the 1,000+ civil servants and contractors on this isolated base, will benefit by having full use of the play parks.

The parents and guardians will be able to continue in their service and related work, confident in the knowledge that their children and young people are using equipment that meets high safety standards.

## Road to Invictus- Recovery through Sport

In September the country rallied behind the brave ex-service men and women, including several RAF Benevolent Fund beneficiaries, as they once again represented the UK in the Invictus Games, this year held in Toronto. The games celebrates the heroism of our ex-serving community in the face of adversity and helps illuminate some of the difficulties they experience leaving the military. At this year's games, there was one issue which stood out – mental health.

Stress and trauma experienced during service can lead to anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression. According to recent research, one in five veterans are likely to be living with a common mental health illness but many do not seek the help they need. It can be difficult to reach out when you are feeling stressed or anxious. A number of the Invictus athletes suffering from PTSD, like RAFBF beneficiary Matt Neve, stepped up and were willing to share their stories.

Former Senior Aircraftsman Matt Neve from Wales, won gold in Toronto for archery, the sport which helped his recovery and gave him a release from the mental health issues he has endured for over a decade. Matt told us about his journey to Invictus.

“I joined the Royal Air Force as a driver in 2001 at just 16 years old. Sadly my career was cut short sooner than I'd hoped when I was medically discharged with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in October 2004.



“When I was discharged, I received very little support. My relationship with my wife began to break down and I became very angry at the world. In 2015, I started a new job and it was a particularly difficult time for me.

“A year later, in June 2016, I took part in an archery taster session, after a friend told me about the physical, psychological and social benefits sport can often have. When I took part in the session and one of the coaches said I had a natural ability in archery, it felt great and that's where the Invictus Games dream started really.

“When I'm drawing the bow I'm only thinking about one thing; hitting that target. It allows me to focus my attention and forget about everything else around me. I approached the RAF Benevolent Fund for support in funding my archery equipment to enable me to continue my sport recovery.”

The RAF Benevolent Fund stepped in and provided Matt with his archery equipment, which gave him something to focus on other than his PTSD and helped him switch off mentally. Following successful try outs, Matt was told he had made the squad for the games.

“To be selected for the team was huge; it gave me a real sense of pride! It helped me realise that perhaps I am worth something and can achieve my goals if I work hard. I had a real sense of achievement and self worth.”

But while the Invictus Games has opened the door for many veterans with mental health issues, sadly there are still plenty suffering in silence. The RAF Benevolent Fund has been helping the RAF Family with mental health issues for many years. We have also long worked with and financially supported Combat Stress, the leading veterans' mental health charity, and now provide a helpline, therapy sessions and self-help materials, working in partnership with Anxiety UK.

Further partnerships with Cruse Bereavement Care and Wellbeing Management Solutions are in development to ensure that we are equipped to help our beneficiaries with their mental health needs. Air Vice-Marshal David Murray, RAFBF Controller reflects that:

“There is still a stigma associated with mental health. The situation has improved drastically from my days in the RAF, when mental health was rarely mentioned. However, with campaigns like World Mental Health Day and the Invictus Games, we are confident that we will soon reach a point where people will no longer feel that they have to suffer in silence.”

Beneficiaries' positive outcomes are delivered thanks to donors' generosity, helping the RAF Benevolent Fund to improve the mental health and well-being of the RAF Family.

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## Our Fundraising: the Wider Picture

Trusts and Foundations form part of a loyal body of supporters of the RAF Benevolent Fund.

RAFBF supporting individuals tend to be current members of the Royal Air Force; they served previously; or are the families of current or former serving personnel. Their generosity is often prompted by a wish to assist the RAF Family in difficulty, and to continue the tradition of looking out for one another.

Fundraisers use a wide range of means: from an older widow leaving a gift in their Will, to a young serving person running a 10-mile race. In recent years we have embraced the digital world to introduce younger audiences, who may not be connected to the Royal Air Force, to the RAF Family's welfare needs.

The Benevolent Fund is the RAF's leading welfare charity, and is seen as the heart of the RAF Family. Coming top as the most trusted non-profit in the Charity Brand Index (2016), we work to preserve this reputation and have made a promise detailing how we are:

- honest, open and transparent
- committed to high standards
- respectful
- accountable

Our supporter promise can be read here: [www.rafbf.org/ways-to-give/our-supporter-promise](http://www.rafbf.org/ways-to-give/our-supporter-promise)