

# ONE HEART

This is what  
your donations  
make happen

YOUR RAF BENEVOLENT FUND  
NEWSLETTER

## IN THANKS TO ERIC CARTER FOR HIS BRAVERY ON A SECRET RAF MISSION WITH FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES

RAF veteran Hurricane pilot Eric Carter, aged 92 at the time, flying at the controls of Boulton Aviation's modified 2-seat Spitfire. Eric is now 101.

OUR DEEPEST THANKS  
TO EVERYONE WHO  
HAS STOOD BY OUR  
RAF FAMILY IN NEED  
DURING THESE  
DIFFICULT TIMES.



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need get help



## OVERCOMING THE ODDS

"I WAS ON LEAVE WHEN THE POLICE CAME  
WITH A TELEGRAM SAYING I HAD TO  
REPORT BACK TO MY UNIT IMMEDIATELY."



Eric was honoured twice by Russia. In 1995, he was invited to be in the Queen's Honour Guard. In 2005, he was allowed to return to Vaenga airfield to lay wreaths at his friends' graves.



When Hurricane pilot Eric Carter was ordered to a special base in Yorkshire in 1941, he did not know that the mission he was about to be sent on would remain a secret for almost 50 years – until an RAF widow put some wartime medals up for sale.

The Order of Lenin is not what you would expect in an RAF veteran's collection. But it proved to be the key to the media unlocking a story of the Second World War that Stalin had hoped would stay forever hidden.

### The secret mission that helped save Russia

The 500 RAF personnel gathered with Eric did not know why they were there. All leave was cancelled. Nobody could leave the base.

Eric has written a book about his time with Force Benedict, available from booksellers.



In time, their mission, codenamed Force Benedict, was revealed. "We were being sent to the Arctic to help the Russians," Eric says. "We were told that we must not let the port of Murmansk fall."

Murmansk was critical to the Allied war effort. If lost, British and American military supplies to help the Russian Army withstand Hitler would not get through. The Nazis could sweep in and subdue Russia in weeks. Stalin asked for help, and Churchill, judging that Hitler would then turn his force on Britain, agreed. So he ordered RAF Hurricane pilots to actively defend Murmansk, train Russian pilots to fly Hurricanes, and leave the aircraft behind to replace destroyed Russian aircraft.

### Hurricanes set sail

Eric was in the first Arctic convoy, on a converted merchant ship. As they approached Russia, half the Hurricanes were flown off the short deck. Eric's was unloaded in Archangelsk.

"I flew up from Archangelsk to Vaenga airfield, and was very short of petrol. There was a chap at the end of the runway with a

pistol that fired colours to tell you if you could land. I got a red light. But I thought, never mind your red light, I'm coming in!"

### Living on the ice

Conditions at Vaenga were hard. Cut into the icy tundra, the men had to use a blowtorch to melt snow to get water.

But there were light moments, like the sauna shack. "There were these ladies who looked after the place and they'd slap our bottoms with birch sticks!"

### British Russian camaraderie

Mutual admiration developed between the men of the RAF and the Russian Air Force as they fought as one against the Luftwaffe, holding Murmansk and protecting supply lines, and as the Russian pilots then learned to handle the Hurricanes being transferred to the Russian Air Force.

By the end of October, Eric's work was done, but with no plans for getting the Hurricane pilots home, Eric had to hitch a ride on a British destroyer. He continued flying throughout the war, including defending Liverpool from German bombers.

THANK YOU  
FOR HELPING  
US BE THERE  
FOR ERIC

We have been privileged to help Eric, now 101, live out his great age in the home he shared with his wife of 62 years, surrounded by memories.

Last year Eric faced having to move into residential care because he now has to use a wheelchair full-time, in part due to injuries sustained in an aircraft crash during RAF service. His son Andrew feels sure his Dad, heartbroken to leave his home, would have given up on life.

"Dad has outlived all his relations and friends," explained Andrew, who lives in the US. "If he had to move away from his village where neighbours pop in, he would have had nobody to visit him.

"But Dad has stayed in his home, with the help of a wonderful live-in carer subsidised by the RAF Benevolent Fund using donations that kind people send in. He is happy there."

£125 could give an RAF veteran like Eric a precious whole week in their own home, by contributing to the support they need.



## CARING FOR OUR OWN

# BRINGING THE WORLD TO ISOLATED VETERANS

In normal times, your support might pay for an RAF veteran to enjoy some welcome company at a lunch club once a week. During the pandemic however, this has stopped, risking already isolated people becoming more cut off. Enter the Grandpad project, swiftly created to help people to stay in the world.

Peter Ashcroft, Head of Community Welfare, explains: "When the pandemic hit, we called 1,500 people we were in contact with, to find out what they needed. Most

had someone to help with food and medication. But social contact was a real problem. Many people were completely cut off at home.

"People asked how they could make video calls. But many didn't have a computer they could use, or didn't have internet. So I found Grandpads – simple computer tablets with the internet built in. They are easy to use, with big buttons for video calling, games, photos, email, entertainment, the internet, and help. A donation from a corporate supporter, MBDA, purchased the first 12, with the rest of the cost being covered by kind donations from individuals.

### Getting moving with a marching band

"Dad has dementia and the Grandpad makes a massive difference," says Heidi, daughter of Brian Wickert. "He plays marching band music on it, and marches up the hallway and around the house. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for giving him this.

"He is RAF through and through. He has three flagpoles in the garden. His bedroom is all RAF plaques. There's a picture of when he joined up. Even the aeroplane biscuit tin the RAF Benevolent Fund delivered for Christmas is on display. Dad has a sleeping bag which we think is from the RAF and helps him feel he is back in the Air Force."

### People at the touch of a button

"It's certainly widened my horizons," says ex-RAF nurse Ann Simmons. "Through the Grandpad and the RAF Benevolent Fund it's been interesting to meet people by video call, who are in the same boat, shielding at home. I've also been able to sort out my Will in a three-way video call with a lawyer and the lady who is my Power of Attorney.

"If I want to add a new person to the list I can call, I send their name and number to the Help Centre, and they vet them before adding them, so it's extra security. If you get stuck, you press the Help button, and get to talk to someone friendly – Andrea usually helps me."

### A break for carers

"I've been inside during the pandemic," says Bob Revis, 79. "I think my Grandpad's fantastic. I like the programmes I get, and the music selection, especially musicals."

Bob has dementia and is cared for by his wife Hazel. "Before the Grandpad, Bob was sleeping day and night, as he hasn't got the respite

or day centre at the moment.

"Now he's reading articles about the RAF on the Grandpad. And he loves the music! The other day I asked him to set the table and noticed he hadn't come back. I went to check on him, and there he is, holding onto a chair, having a dance to his Grandpad. It was lovely for me to see."



Left: Bob Revis during his RAF days at RAF Tanmere. Above: Bob using his Grandpad to stay connected to the outside world.

## THIS MONTH IN RAF HISTORY



### 27 March 1918

Lt Alan Arnett McLeod of No.2 Squadron was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions on this day. At 19, he was the youngest airman to receive it during the First World War, for a bombing mission and for saving the life of his observer after being shot down.



### 27 March 1980

When a North Sea accommodation platform capsized with 208 oil rig workers, a Sea King of 'A' flight, No. 202 Squadron took off from RAF Boulmer within minutes. In 60-knot winds, winchman Flt Sgt C M Yarwood rescued 10 men from a raft. 120 men were lost.





# JOIN OUR DAMBUSTERS BIKE RIDE, WHEREVER YOU ARE

Here is a great goal for keen cyclists to build up to after months of lockdown: our Dambusters bike ride on 15-16 May in the Spring fresh air to raise money to help the RAF Family in need.

You can cycle your 56 or 100 miles anywhere in the world, as a solo rider, or in a team of up to 10 colleagues, friends and family.

To register, please go to [challenge@rafbf.org.uk](mailto:challenge@rafbf.org.uk) or call **020 7307 3321** (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm).

Later in the year, on 3 July, 300 cyclists will be taking in landmarks in the east of England that are significant to Dambusters 617 Squadron and its Squadron Leader, 'Johnny' Johnson.

These will include the Petwood Hotel in Lincolnshire, home of the Dambusters, RAF College

Cranwell where they completed their training, RAF Scampton where the Dambusters flew

from and Highfields School in Newark where Johnny taught after the Second World War.

Whoever raises the most money as an individual wins a flight in a classic Tiger Moth! The top fundraising team will win VIP tickets to the RAF Benevolent Fund's Dambuster Dinner at the Petwood Hotel in October 2021.



## TRYING TO KEEP PACE WITH ESCALATING NEED

You make everything we achieve happen. As members of the RAF Family struggle in the upheaval and upset that has come with the pandemic, we are using your gifts to do all we can to help them. In 2020:



We made **3,748** friendly phone calls to **277** isolated members of our RAF Family.



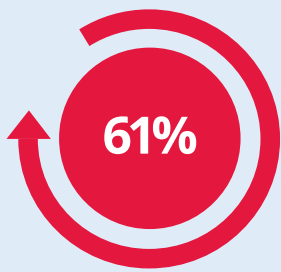
Financial hardship grants went up by **11%** as the pandemic has progressed.



Grants for funeral costs sadly increased from **197** to **222**.



Our Advocacy Service helped **202%** more people.



**61%** more people used our Benefits Advice Service as the economic effects of Covid took hold.



Our Listening and Counselling Service helped **32%** more people.



## CREATE A DEDICATION IN MEMORY OF AN RAF LOVED ONE

Did you know that we have a special Dedication space where you can write a message and post a picture in memory of someone from the RAF Family? You can then share it, if you would like to, with friends and family around the world.

Miss Alexis Fielder wrote a dedication to her father, Douglas Lewis Charles Fielder, who flew as a Wireless Operator and Gunner attached to No. 83 and No. 216 Middle East Squadrons. She said to us, "I know my father would have been happy to be remembered this way, by keeping a connection with the RAF career he loved. The RAF was his life and, as his family, ours too."

To create your own Dedication, please visit [rafbf.org/dedication](https://rafbf.org/dedication)



Any gift you send today, large or small, will help make a lifechanging difference to members of our RAF Family. The enclosed donation form makes it easy. Or you can call **020 7580 8343** or go online: [rafbf.org.uk/oneheart](https://rafbf.org.uk/oneheart)



Royal Air Force  
Benevolent Fund