



Republic of Ireland Branch

GEN SHEET NOVEMBER 2017

**ROYAL  
AIR FORCES  
Association**

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## European Area Conference 2017 in Dublin

Our Branch was honoured and privileged to host the RAF Association European Area Conference from Friday, 6 October 2017 to Sunday, 8 October 2017 at the Marine Hotel in Sutton, Co. Dublin. This conference is the most important and prestigious event that any



Branch can host. It was particularly special for us because we hosted it in our 70<sup>th</sup> year. Our guests included: Air Marshal Sir Baz North, President of the RAF Association and Lady Fiona North; Air Marshal Philip Sturley, President of the RAF Association European Area and Mrs Micheline Sturley; Air Marshal Sir Christopher Coville and Lady Irene Coville, and Sarah Waugh, Area Director. You might be interested to know that AM Sturley is originally from Co Mayo.

**Photo: HE Robin Barnett addressing the conference with AM Sturley EA President and Bob Hunt EA Chairman**

The European Area Council held a pre-conference meeting at 17:00 hours to discuss any major and priority issues and make sure that all Council members were well briefed for the main Conference on Saturday. The social side of things started in a lively fashion on Friday evening with a display of Irish Dancing. The performance of the young gentleman of the group was truly amazing - hardly surprising when we learned that he had danced with Riverdance. The enjoyment and enthusiasm were so infectious that we managed to get three Air Marshals up to join in! The consumption of prosecco did not hinder their astonishingly accomplished footwork. One of them "no names, no pack drill" later remarked that he felt competent to audition for Strictly Come Dancing - in his words "the Over-70s version."

The serious business of the Conference took place on Saturday. We were delighted to welcome His Excellency, Robin Barnett CMG, the British Ambassador to open the Conference. Although Brexit and its effects on members living outside the United Kingdom was high on the agenda, we were unable to reach any major conclusions because of the uncertainty of what the outcomes of the current negotiations will be. Minutes will be circulated as soon as they become available.

Frank Brien, our Standard Bearer, was awarded an Area President's Certificate and badge for his outstanding work over many years, representing the Branch at formal and informal events. Tony Breen, another of our members, was awarded the Wally Marriott Trophy in recognition of the huge efforts he puts into supporting the Branch's social gatherings and visiting veterans in his local area. We also received a Certificate for contributing £7,500 to the Wings Appeal in 2016/17. Our Chairman, Pete McWilliams, would like to congratulate Frank and Tony and also to thank everyone who gave so generously to make the Wings Appeal contribution possible.



**Photo: Air Marshal Philip Sturley presenting Frank with his certificate**

On the Saturday afternoon after the Conference ended, some participants took the planned excursion to Malahide Castle and gardens. Thankfully, the weather was kind to us all and everyone enjoyed the trip.

On Saturday evening, the hotel provided delicious finger food and more prosecco to whet our appetite for the Gala Dinner to follow. We were delighted to welcome H.E. Robin Barnett to rejoin us for the Gala Dinner. The food was good, the drink flowed and the 'craic was mighty', all aided by a five-piece band. It was very pleasing to see some of our long-standing members at the Gala Dinner including Branch President, Alan Harrisson BEM.



**Photo: Vice Chairman John Connolly accepting, on behalf of Tony Breen, the Wally Marriott Trophy from Air Marshal Sir Christopher Coville.**

The Conference was brought to a close by an ecumenical service of thanksgiving and remembrance at Glasnevin Cemetery. The service was conducted by Fr. Paddy Jones and Rev. James Carson. The standards were marched into the Chapel to the sound of the Royal Air Force March Past. Branch Chairman, Pete McWilliams, welcomed everyone and paid tribute to all the Irish men and women of the RFC and RAF who served and continue to serve and especially those who gave their lives to preserve our freedoms. He stressed the importance of the event and location to the Branch since we were thanking and honouring these Irish men and women on their own soil. We sang "God is Our Refuge" to the tune of the Dambusters. The standards were then marched, led by a piper, to the Cross of Sacrifice. Prayers were offered, followed by the Last Post, dipping of standards, minute's silence and Reveille. Our Branch Vice Chairman, John Connolly, read the RAF Association Dedication, followed by the Exhortation. At this point, our Chairman invited the RAF Association European Area President, Air Marshal Philip Sturley, to lay a wreath on behalf of the European Area. John Connolly laid a wreath on behalf of our Branch. The Sud-Ouest Branch (France) also laid a wreath. To conclude the ceremony, the piper played a lament and there was a final blessing from the clergy. Miracles do happen, it did not rain over the weekend of the Conference!



The Branch wishes to thank everyone who attended and who assisted and supported us in any way. A special thanks to Committee members, Sqn Ldr John Burke, John Connolly, Gilly Beare, Paddy O'Reilly and Ronnie O'Connor for meeting and greeting at the airport and also for very generously ferrying arrivals from the airport to the hotel. John Connolly showed exceptional skill in managing the music in the chapel and John Burke did a fantastic job as parade commander. As usual, our Standard Bearer, Frank Brien, was immaculate and did us proud, and, he and Mary entertained everyone with their banter at the Gala Dinner raffle. A special thanks to George English, RBL member and ex-Royal Marine who carried the Tricolour. These were only some of the many important jobs that had to be done. A huge thank you to Sarah Waugh our Area Director for her sound advice and support on the run up to and during the Conference.

The Branch would like to thank Steven Fuery of PAB Tours, our partners in organising the Conference, and the management and staff at the Marine Hotel who did a superb job. The Branch would also like to thank George McCullough, Liz Fitzpatrick and the staff at Glasnevin for allowing us to use the Chapel and cemetery for our closing parade. Thanks also to the ONE members of the Erskine Childers Branch who stood shoulder to shoulder with us at the parade.

All the European Area Council members and delegates sent back complimentary emails after they had returned to their home branches. I'm sure you are all aware that our Branch took on the task of planning and organising the Conference at short notice when the Costa del Sol Branch had to cancel. One particular aspect that we were complimented on was "outsourcing" the Conference, because we had so little time to plan and organise the event. Normally, a branch has 12 months but we had only half that time. AM Sturley complimented us on "stepping up to the plate at the last minute and doing a great job of it". In addition, Nick Bunting, Secretary General of the Association, singled out our Branch for praise for our success in recruiting new members this year and in past years. It is worth noting that awards have been made to members of our Branch at this conference and at every conference in recent years. Similarly, our Branch has received certificates for our contributions to the Wings Appeal in this conference and in recent conferences. We are punching well above our weight and we can hold our heads high and be very proud. Of course, none of this would be possible without the exceptional generosity and solid support of you the members. Thank you all.

As an aside to the business of the Conference, we need to be mindful of the possible very trying times ahead as a result of the UK's Brexit vote and drastic cuts in numbers in HM armed Forces. Brexit is unlikely to have much effect on UK branches. That is not the case with European Area Branches. We are most at risk from Brexit, therefore, our best allies and those most likely to support us are our friends in the European Area because the issues that affect us also affect them. We cannot know with any degree of certainty what the effects will be but pensions and healthcare agreements are issues to look out for. The message here is that all members of this Branch should give their maximum support to the European Area.

## **Branch Annual Garden Party – Leopardstown Park Hospital**

We were blessed with good weather on the day. We had a good attendance but down a little on previous years. However, that did not detract from the day at all. The BBQ provided by the Catering Staff was excellent as usual as were their sandwiches. One of our members, Mr Martin, very kindly donated some superb scones and a massive cake, a big thanks to him. Our Secretary, Mrs Pam Roche, organised a fantastic soprano, Eve, whose singing was the highlight of the event. Pam also organised a tombola session which was hugely popular. We also ran a book stall and sold aircraft lapel badges and ran a Name-Me Bear raffle. Thanks to Lorraine McWilliams for running these fundraisers. All these elements along with the donations at the door raised significant revenue for our Wings Appeal fund. It is efforts like this that results in our Branch receiving certificates most years for our contributions. A book entitled *Leopardstown Park Hospital, 1917-2017: A Home for Wounded Soldiers* by Dr Eoin Kinsella on the history of Leopardstown Park Hospital had just been published.



**Photo: Our good friends and supporters from the ONE at the Garden Party in Leopardstown**

## **Branch Annual Dinner – National Yacht Club**

This year, the Branch held its Annual Dinner at the National Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire on 13 September. The numbers attending were down slightly on previous years but to those that were there, it was one of the best in recent years. Thanks to John Connolly and Alan Harrisson for organising the event. We were delighted to give a warm welcome to Col Rory O'Connor, Chief of the Air Staff – Support, Irish Air Corps, and the recently-retired GOC of the Irish Air Corps, Brig Gen Paul Fry and Mrs Gill Fry as our distinguished guests. HE Robin Barnett, British Ambassador, sent his apologies for not being able to attend; he had to attend a very important official engagement at short notice. We were delighted see members of the RBL, RNA and the ONE sharing the dinner with us. Long may this friendship, support and co-operation continue. Given that this dinner celebrates particularly but not exclusively the Battle of Britain, Branch Chairman, Pete McWilliams, gave a short speech in tribute to John Hemingway, the last surviving Irish Battle of Britain pilot.



John's story is one of remarkable courage and determination and an inspiration to all. Yet again, the National Yacht Club exceeded our expectations and put on superb catering and service as well as providing a magnificent venue. Our thanks to them.

**Photo: Chairman, Pete McWilliams, with Col Rory O'Connor**

## **Battle of Britain Service – St Patrick's Cathedral**

This year saw a larger than usual attendance at the Battle of Britain Service in St Patrick's Cathedral. As usual, our Standard Bearer, Frank Brien, paraded our standard, escorted by Branch Vice Chairman, John Connolly, and Chairman, Pete McWilliams. Colonel Max Walker, British Defence Attaché, read the first lesson and Ms Sarah Tiffin, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy read the second lesson. Ms Tiffin laid a wreath on behalf of the British Embassy accompanied by Colonel Max Walker. Branch President, Alan Harrisson BEM laid a wreath on behalf of the Branch.

## **Branch Grand Raffle**

The Branch Grand Raffle draw was made at our October monthly social gathering at the National Yacht

Club in Dun Laoghaire. The winners were:

Mr Arthur Brady €750, Mr P Mulhern €250, Mrs Trish Armstrong €100.

Other prizes of chocolates or wine were won by:

Ms Ellen Power, Mr John Keoghan, Mr Frank Brien, Wendy (c/o Mrs Audrey Kirkpatrick), Mr P O'Donoghue.

Thanks to everyone who sold and bought tickets, your efforts ensured it was a success.

## RAF Association at the Cenotaph in London

This year it was the turn of the European Area to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph in London on behalf of the RAF Association. The wreath layer was Dr Bryan Pattison of the Swiss Branch who is Life Vice-President of the European Area Council. Dr Pattison was escorted by wreath



bearer Pete McWilliams, Chairman of the Republic of Ireland Branch. It was a huge honour and privilege for the Republic of Ireland Branch to have one of its members selected as wreath bearer.

Photo: Dr Pattison on the right (white hair) with RoI Chairman behind and to the right.

### Branch Christmas Party

The Branch is holding its annual Christmas Party on Saturday, 16 December 2017 at 12:30 p.m. in Old Wesley Rugby Club in Donnybrook. The Lunch is €28.00 per person. This will be the last social event of the year for members, so please come along and enjoy an afternoon of great food and good company. Branch Secretary Pam Roche is organising the event, so please contact her on 086 353 1771 to book your place.

### Advance Notice - Branch Annual General Meeting

**The AGM will be held on 13 March 2018 at 2:00 p.m. in the National Yacht Club** in Dun Laoghaire. We hope that the change to an earlier time will allow more people to attend. This is a very important AGM, because there will be major changes to the committee. It is important for the Branch that you attend if you can.

The following Committee members are **standing down** and are **not** seeking re-election as officers or committee members:

- Chairman, Pete McWilliams
- Vice-Chairman, John Connolly
- Treasurer, Sqn Ldr John Burke (w.e.f. 31/12/2017)
- Welfare Officer/Membership Secretary, Mrs Gilly Beare (w.e.f. 31/12/2017)
- Committee Member, Paddy O'Reilly
- Committee Member, Ronnie O'Connor

Along with this Gen Sheet are Nomination Slips. **If you are nominating people, please make sure you get your completed slips back to The Secretary by 20 February 2018.**

If you nominate candidates make sure you obtain their permission first. Also ensure you add the names of the nominee, proposer and seconder and that all have signed.

## **Membership and Welfare Enquires**

**After 31/12/2017, direct all Membership and Welfare enquires to the Secretary, Mrs Pam Roche, 45 Cardy Rock Crescent, Balbriggan, Co Dublin KT32 T998  
Mobile: 086 353 1771 Email: pamale@eircom.net**

## **A Message from your Chairman**

Firstly, I wish all of you and your families and friends a very happy Christmas and good health, happiness and every success in the New Year.

I am sure you are aware that this Branch is one of the European Area (EA) Branches. The EA Council is the forum that represents your interests and the interests of this Branch. For this reason, I urge you to fully support the EA Council, especially with Brexit looming. The feedback from the European Area Council members and delegates at the European Area Conference in October is a sincere acknowledgement and fitting tribute to you all. Their comments are a reflection of the very high regard in which this Branch is held.

I shall be stepping down as your Chairman at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in March 2018. I am not seeking re-election and I am also stepping down from the Committee. I have been a member of this Branch since 1996. I was elected Chairman in 2011 so I shall have served six years when I step down. Before being elected Chairman, I served as the Branch Welfare Officer for two years. I shall continue to be a member of the Branch.

I place great value on loyalty, commitment and a positive attitude. I would like to thank most deeply and sincerely all those members and Committee members who supported me and who have worked very hard down the years to make this Branch the exceptional model that it is. It has been a great honour and a special privilege to have served you.

As this is the last Gen Sheet I shall be producing, I leave you with the following thoughts. My hope is that the Branch will continue to thrive and be an organisation that you are happy and proud to belong to. My prayer is that you will keep well, enjoy life and remain safe. I wish the Branch every success for the future.

***Pete McWilliams***