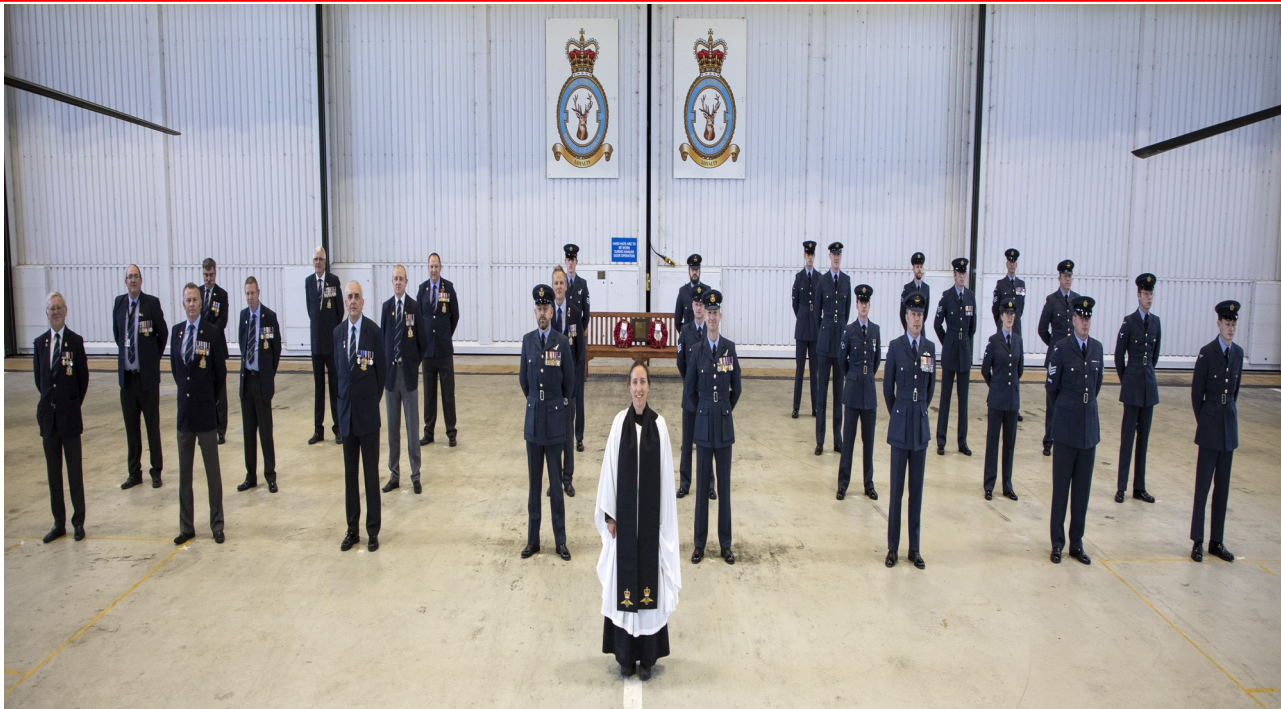




CRETE DAY AT BENSON

80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GERMAN AIRBORNE INVASION OF CRETE COMMEMORATED AT 33 SQUADRON



Thursday 20 May 2021

Twenty years after the 60th Anniversary celebrations were held at IWM Duxford to mark the last official 'Crete Day' in 33 Squadron's Social Calendar it was with great pleasure that ten 33 Squadron Association personnel were allowed to join with twenty serving members of 33 Squadron last Thursday at a small commemoration service held to remember the start of Operation MERCURY, the beginning of the German airborne invasion of Crete on 20 May 1941.

The idea for the Crete commemoration service came about after a smaller service had been held at the Kosovo Memorial plinth in front of the Squadron on 9 April, where wreaths were laid to remember Captain Andy Crous and Flight Lieutenant Mark Maguire, who lost their lives on 9 April 2001 when their Puma crashed in in the Kacanik Defile. (Report and photos in the Chairman's Note, Loyalty Issue 14 Part One). Even though the number of people allowed to attend the Kosovo Commemoration service was limited to seven, plus the Padre, the service went very well.

This year's plans for representatives from 33 Squadron and members of the 33 Squadron Association to meet up in Crete for the 80th Anniversary Commemorations had been scuppered due to the COVID travel restrictions, but in discussion after the Kosovo service the 2IC, Jez Allinson, the Vice Chairman, Dave Stewart, and Padre Rebekah Cannon agreed that it would be remiss not to mark the 80th Anniversary of Crete in

some way, even if it was with another short service held at the Crete Memorial bench.

A flurry of emails and activity followed, with the 2IC seeking and being given permission to hold another service. The project was given to the JEngO to run with, which meant background articles were researched, speeches were drawn up and 'volunteers' chosen to do the readings, wreaths were ordered, car passes arranged, even the bench was revarnished. Best of all, after 18 months of being closed, permission was given for the Hart's Head to open after the service was over.

Who knows how different our Squadron history might have been had the weather 80 years ago been as bad as that which greeted us that afternoon. I was so grateful to be told on arrival, in my rather wet overcoat after a short walk from MSHATF, that we were going to conduct the service indoors and that the Memorial bench was positioned in the hangar beneath two very large 33 Squadron crests.

Having welcomed everyone and acknowledged that some people had travelled a very long way to get here (take a bow, Tony!) the effervescent Padre Rebekah Cannon delivered yet another appropriate and amusing service, drawing interesting comparisons from then and now, and trying to work out just how many years of experience the ten Association members on parade had under their belts. Something for the younger members of the Squadron to aspire

to, she thought. The laying of the two wreaths by Flight Lieutenant Ben Wallis AFC and Jez Reid, the Association's Treasurer, and a short two minute silence drew the service to an end.

The opportunity to gather in the Hart's Head and enjoy a beer with Association colleagues and the serving members of the 33 Squadron was not available in April, so the relaxing of the restrictions is yet another positive sign that we are finally returning to a more normal life. The one sign that we are not quite out of the woods yet was the absence of OC 33 Squadron and the crews that had been out to America and were back in UK but were under quarantine. However, the personnel who had remained behind during Exercise Imperial Zephyr proved amusing and entertaining companions for the evening.

My thanks go to the 2IC and JEngO for ensuring the idea got off the ground and we were able to commemorate a special event in the Squadron's history; to Padre Rebekah, whose enthusiasm and *joie de vie* is infectious; and to the 'volunteers' who manned the bar for the evening. Having discovered recently that former OC 33, Keith Harding, originally established Crete Day as a 'Day' for the Squadron to remember its history and celebrate all that is good about 33 Squadron, let us hope that this will not be the last Crete Day ever celebrated by its personnel.





Meanwhile, as reported by Gareth Attridge on the 'Past and Present' FB page earlier this evening, the official commemorations being held on the island for the 80th Anniversary of Crete came to an end tonight. The RAF presence was once again remembered with a flypast by the Red Arrows at the closing ceremony at Maleme airfield.

Dave Stewart

LOYALTY

