



**Happy 104th Birthday, 33 Squadron!**  
**The first Association gathering of 2020 marks**  
**33's official 'Formation Day' - a day early!**



Sunday 12 January 2020

A drinking establishment quite close to RAF Benson was the scene yesterday for the first 33 Squadron Association social gathering of the year, an informal lunch to celebrate the formation 104 years ago of No.33 (Home Defence) Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. Members came from as far away as York, Bury St Edmunds and the Forest of Dean for the first ever 'Formation Day Dinner', an occasion that the Committee hopes will become a regular event in the Association's calendar. We were all well aware that the Squadron formed at Bristol Filton on 12 January which, in 1916, was a Wednesday, but arranging a more formal mid-week or Sunday event had proved far too difficult.

The hospitality that we received at the Shepherd's Hut was excellent, and had been recommended by OC 33 Squadron himself, having used it to host and cater for a number of informal events in recent months. As well as being able to enjoy some delicious food and drink in comfortable and welcoming surroundings, the afternoon was made even more pleasant by having several ladies present, and they all expressed their support when the Chairman, Dick Brewster, said during his speech that the Committee was looking to arrange another 'with partners' function for the summer. We also discovered that one of the members present celebrates his birthday on 12 January, so it's Happy Birthday 33 and Happy Birthday Andy!





**DC, a man who is always keen to tackle local gastronomic delights, prepares to tackle the legendary 'Dirty Fluxy' !**

### **Did 33 Squadron form before 12 January 1916?**

In the National Archives at Kew it is recorded that instructions were issued on 31 December 1915 that the nucleus of No. 33 Squadron should be formed from the surplus personnel of No.20 Squadron and take over their training duties, and that the Squadron was formed in the 4th Wing of V Brigade on 12 January 1916 at Bristol Filton Aerodrome under Major Philip Joubert de la Ferté, a veteran aviator who had been part of the RFC's initial deployment to France in 1914 to support the BEF, and who had been part of the first ever reconnaissance task carried out by aeroplanes.

Major de la Ferté had been sent home from France in December 1915, and in his book 'The Fated Sky' he wrote:

*"I was in a hospital ship bound for England. Although I did not realize it at the time, the fact that I had fallen sick caused me to have a serious fall from grace in the eyes of General Trenchard. 'Boom' Trenchard was - officially - never ill and he had little use for people who 'went sick'. It was some years before I regained favour in his eyes.*

*After a week or two at home I was able to persuade a medical board (they did not need much persuasion then) that I was fit for light duty. The light duty that came my way was the formation of a new Squadron at Filton Aerodrome, near Bristol. From the outgoing Squadron, on its way to France and early destruction, I took over some aircraft without engines, crates of engines that did not fit the aircraft, one Corporal and sixty men whose trade qualifications varied from 'indifferent' to 'bad'. There was also one Flight Commander and a dozen pupils. Fortunately I knew a number of good men recovering from illness but still in hospital. These were slipped past the unwatchful eyes of the doctors and helped me to mould our uncompromising material into something resembling a Squadron, But it was hard and thankless work. The weather did not help. About Christmas a blizzard blew up which*

*did a great deal of damage and stopped flying for several days. The cold worried our convalescent team very much, and as far as I was concerned, if I had not found a good line in vintage port in my hotel I might have gone back to hospital again.*

*At this time the Zeppelins had been causing alarm and despondency in the country and my Squadron, No. 33, was destined to take part in the defence against their attacks. The Chief Constable of Bristol was very anxious about the possibilities of air raids on the city and had done a great deal to improve the 'black-out'. I was asked to fly over the city and report upon the amount of light that was still showing. This was my first experience of serious night flying and I spent a long time cruising over the docks and centre of the town, pinpointing places which showed too much light. When I got back to the aerodrome a lamp was flashing the following signal: "For God's sake come down. We want our dinner!"*

*By the spring of 1916 the Squadron had at last taken shape and we were moved to our operational station at Tadcaster, from which we were to defend the industrial Midland and Leeds in particular....."*



**Major Philip Joubert de la Ferté**

33 Squadron's long and impressive history had begun, and I am pleased to record that the trade qualifications of the engineers have been first rate ever since! The major is somewhat vague with his facts and dates, but writing that a blizzard 'about Christmas' stopped flying for several days stopped flying implies that the Squadron had started flying in late December 1915. The official formation date given in January may coincide with the deployment to France of the squadron whose surplus equipment provided the nucleus for 33.

There is similar confusion with the official reformation date at Odiham when the Puma was being brought into service in 1971. We know that the aircraft was being flown from the beginning of the year as crews posted in from other aircraft got to grips with the new helicopter. We also know that the OC, Fred Hoskins, was posted in in January 1971. Some records show 33 Squadron as forming 14 June 1971 whereas the official Reformation Parade took place on 27 September 1971. Until proved otherwise, we will happily stick with 12 January 1916 as our official birthday. For the Committee dealing with the Puma's 50th anniversary in 2021, deciding on a suitable date might prove rather perplexing.

## **LOYALTY**