

# LOYALTY

The Newsletter of the Association of Number 33 Squadron, RAF



## From The Boss:

*"I was fortunate enough to take command of the Squadron in November last year and, although I was warned, I have been stunned at the speed with which 6 months in 'the Chair' has flown by. It is a genuine privilege for me to have been given the opportunity to command the finest squadron in the RAF, and the squadron on which I undertook my first tour. Like most, I have so many great 'first-tour' memories and stories which are vividly brought back to life (often at some sort of social gathering with the assistance of a drink or two...) when we reminisce and get together to 'spin dits' or 'pull up a sandbag'. Ultimately it is this activity that is at the 'hart' (pun intended) of what the Association is all about. 33 Squadron has always been a professional and capable unit with a quietly competent persona - we've always delivered, but don't like to shout about it. While I would not seek to change the Squadron's inherent character, as we approach our centenary in around 18 months, it is perhaps time to start to recognise and celebrate more openly the achievements and unique history of 33 Squadron. The Association, I hope, will enable this and provide us with that slightly more formal link to keep the Squadron spirit and memories alive. Please pass on the message about joining the Association to Squadron members past and present. As I said at the beginning of this, time passes all too quickly, but we can slow it down every now and again by getting together and enjoying reliving those moments - the Association should help you to do this more often. Finally, it is not all about the past - the introduction of Puma 2 has instilled new life in to the Squadron and as we prepare to create more of those 'dits' and 'sandbag' moments as we go forward. As a member of the Association, whether a present or past Squadron member, you'll be part of it all too."*

Wg Cdr Mark "Biggers" Biggadike,  
Association Chairman



## An Introduction from Air Commodore Paul Lyall, Honorary President

I first joined 33 Squadron in the early 90s at RAF Odiham. The first thing you noticed as you went through the front door was a huge 'wailing wall' running the full length of the operations room.

This was designed to get the maximum amount of work out of a small number of people. You had to keep your eye on it, otherwise you would find a plum detachment to Belize replaced with yet another exercise in Germany, or just another stint in Belfast. For a new arrival, the 'wailing wall' was a very good indicator of the special ethos of 33 Squadron. The work was clearly going to be hard, but there was also going to be world-wide adventure to be had. Some ten years later I had the great privilege of commanding the Squadron and taking it to war in the Gulf. The way that the Puma Force pulled together, and the fighting spirit shown by each and every person, was absolutely outstanding.



Each of us will hold similar memories of our time on the Squadron.

All of us will recognise the Squadron's enduring work hard - play hard ethos. We have always prided ourselves on this 'workaday' nature. Sleeves rolled up, get stuck in, no complaints, job well done.

It has also meant that we have always been too busy to bother forming a Squadron Association.

But now seems to be the time. For three reasons. Firstly, the suggestion came unsolicited from the ground crew - it was not dictated top-down. Secondly, the dear old Puma is getting a new lease of life and it seems a shame not to move on with it. Finally, as our Squadron motto is 'loyalty', it is about time that we allowed veterans to show their loyalty to current members and vice versa.

So I thank Wing Commander Biggadike for allowing this day to happen and Paul Davies for forming the Association and driving it forward. I commend the concept to you all.

Loyalty,  
Paul Lyall

## Rumour Control: News from the Front Line.

*From the Editor.....*

*Welcome to the very first edition of "Loyalty", the newsletter of the newly-formed 33 Squadron RAF Association. The ideas behind this newsletter are several. It will, of course, be a focus for reflection on the Sqn's previous achievements and the contribution of alumni, but the Association should be much more than an "Old Boys" club only looking backwards; the current and future activity of our accomplished but unassuming unit will continue to inspire us all and I look forward personally to many more years of connection with the Sqn on which I did, and learnt, most during my service. The committee welcome any thoughts or ideas for the Association, future reunions or the newsletter. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this first approach and look forward to sharing a beer at the first shindig at Benson in May. Loyalty.*

Paul Webster, Editor.



### Aircrew Blah - Flt Lt Paul Spiers

33 Sqn saw the retirement of the Puma HC Mk1 in December 2012 after over 40 years of loyal service and the historic day was suitably marked by a 4 ship flypast of RAF Benson. Then began the wait for Puma HC Mk 2 with eager anticipation.

Although life on the Sqn may have been somewhat quieter throughout 2013 than in recent history its people were still extremely busy. Personnel were detached to such exotic locations as JHC, HQ Land, JHC Air Manoeuvre Planning Team and to the AAC at Wattisham Airfield. We also had a large number of personnel deploy on Op HERRICK, some to Task Force Helmand, some to the Joint Aviation Group (JAG) and others to Leatherneck (USMC) working with the Marine Aviation Wing. Others took the opportunity for force development training, professional courses and qualifications and of course the wiser men and women of 33 banished the post Christmas blues by going sailing in the Caribbean. The diverse experiences gained by a great many of our personnel will prove invaluable when we return to front line operations.

Flt Lt Baz Stokes left us in early 2013 for snowier climes in Canada, joining their Flying Training School as a QHI. Flt Lt Kieran Smith and Flt Lt John Longland also departed 33 Sqn to undertake QHI training at RAF Shawbury-we hope to see them both back on the Sqn in the future.

In February the first batch of our QHIs began the factory delivered training package at EC UK for the new aircraft as well as continuing to devise the conversion course for us non-QHI type people!

With the focus returning to contingency ops, much of the early part of 2013 was spent running exercises and planning scenarios to re-hone the Squadrons' skills to ensure the transition would be as smooth as possible. In addition, to help mitigate the long lay off from flying duties, assistance was sought from DHFS RAF Shawbury. A package was developed for all Sqn aircrew to fly approximately 20 hours on the Griffin HT1 ensuring we didn't become too rusty!

Friday 17th May 2013 was another poignant date in 33 Squadrons' history as we retired our old Sqn Standard and enjoyed a ceremony for the consecration of the new Standard. HRH Prince Michael of Kent was the key speaker and the event was marked with a parade marching to the beat of the Central Band of the Royal Air Force. Even the Officers managed to march pretty well, probably owing to the perseverance of angry Regiment Flt Sgts!!! The retired Standard was

laid-up in St Mary-le-More Church in Wallingford on 6th May this year. It takes pride-of-place in the centre of a couple of other colours just on the left inside the entrance to the church.

The latter half of the year saw the commencement of the Puma HC Mk 2 conversion courses for both Sqns. The courses have progressed well and the vast majority of Puma 1 aircrew are now qualified on the new aircraft. The Puma Mk 2 is an excellent aircraft and albeit with some Release to Service restrictions is already once again proving its worth to wider defence, having supported Exercise Chameleon at RAF Leeming (flying over 400 hours with 2/3 aircraft) and Exercise Joint Warrior. We have a full exercise programme for the remainder of the year giving 33 Sqn the opportunity to demonstrate the ever increasing capability of our new platform.

33 Sqn is in a good place in early 2014 and the first intake by the OCF of non-Puma 1 aircrew has begun. We look forward to a great many more years of 33 Sqn operating this impressive new aircraft and continuing to build on our illustrious history and well earned reputation well in to the future.



Groundcrew Blah - FS Stew Jarrett

### News from 33 Sqn Wpns TM

The last 10 months since I arrived on the mighty 33 Sqn have flown by, and now so are the quite remarkable Puma HC Mk 2s!! The first RTS hasn't released the all-new exciting Armourer aspects of this new dynamic aircraft yet, but that hasn't stopped the 33 Sqn plumbers digging in with the preparations. A revamped Role equipment bay is already providing a swift and quality approved service to the Puma Force engineering shifts. An entirely new Fire Extinguishing System has seen the humble Armourer spending a lot more man-hours on the frame. This unique dual system has four explosive cartridges to give the crew a double shot at extinguishing a fire in either engine. The removal and servicing process is now an end-to-end Armourer task which has, in the interim required some good ole engineering ingenuity to ensure the task is carried out MAP compliant. It now includes a No Volts Safety Check to instil

confidence that the SAC(T) Bomb Head is going to walk away from the job with ten digits still intact. The Sqn Weapons Techs are also proving their worth outside of their trade, building a refurbished undercarriage malfunction kit with shiny new S-Type trolleys to facilitate the new crash safety plan. Looking to the future, a new GPMG mount complete with ballistic protection will be used for gunning, proved and tested in Afghanistan on the British Army's WMIKs. A new hoist for winching operations is on trial, an updated DAS suite, armoured floor panels, armoured seats and ballistic self-sealing fuel tanks are all going to make the Puma HC Mk 2 as hard as a Walnut, a real Soldiers Support Helicopter. All this being looked after by the Royal Air Force Armourers, indeed adding to their core slogan, 'Break Glass in case of War'.

### Puma Force Mechanical Trade Manager – A Self Portrait

Contrary to belief, the Mechanical Trade Manager is not just to be found hibernating away in the corner of the hangar, although the heating in the office does work and is a contributory factor in winter. A stack of planted, germinating seedlings in trays is a clear indication that warmth and comfort are a desirable feature for this ageing Chief - although the CDT Team do have a vested interest in this propagation!

So what does this role consist of, I hear you all ask?

Notwithstanding his experience of nine years on all marks Puma, well, Mk 1 and Mk 2, a definite positive to have when dealing with Engineering Officers, it is a known fact that it is easy to baffle with waffle.

Dealing with faulty equipment, procurement of specific tooling (Puma Mk 2), drafting Technical Queries and instigating Quality Occurrence Reports are continually routine and often frustrating. So keeping him happy is paramount, doughnuts are a good starting point, but please do continue to add to his workload, it will ultimately achieve the desired result of a smooth introduction of Puma Mk 2 into Service.

So where do we stand with the all singing and dancing Puma Mk 2, notwithstanding a lot of corrective maintenance and long hours at work, there is light at the end of the tunnel. No, it does not mean that the Mech TM is retiring just yet, though that is his aspiration, there are some warmer Detachments in the pipeline and more modifications to be added.

Ballistic flooring, self sealing fuel tanks, additional fuel tanks not unlike CAFFTs but a lot smaller, Wire Cutters, Hydraulic Winch and more goochy stuff on the way. To sum it up and it is not just a "Fist full of Tie Bolts" there is still much to be done, this is just not all about Squibs, Armourer trade take note!!

I have lived by the motto of "Work hard play hard" and now as a balding, grey, old sweat, the journey has been tough at times but all those memories generated along the way of Puma have been great ones!

### Puma Force Avionics Trade Manager

The 'Elite' Avionics Trade has warmly welcomed the arrival of the Puma HC Mk 2 and its more modern suite of electronics. The complexity of everyday jobs, which on Puma HC Mk 1 were a formality, have all of a sudden become major maintenance. With new systems, a new ADS and the introduction of GOLDesp (LITs replacement) all have added further complexity, with the net effect of extending the time spent changing anything.

Personnel are coming to terms with the processes required and the assistance expected from external agencies to get the job done and knowledge and speed of action is improving. Though at times to accomplish this we have needed to become tri-lingual, easily translating Spanish and French to ensure the functionals are working correctly!

Airbus Helicopters elected not to implement too many advances in technology for our Mechanical counterparts, leaving the majority of items from Puma HC Mk 1 as they were. However with the introduction of the more powerful Makila Engines, initially the Avionics Trade were barred from getting involved in any maintenance, as it was touted they were not trained to a high enough standard. That was instantly rebuffed when the 1<sup>st</sup> avionics Sgt on the course proved the point by getting the highest ever pass mark set in the highly acclaimed Makila 1A Engine Course. Having

now claimed the highest ever exam result on a mechanical piece of kit, surely it is irrefutable proof that that we are obviously much more intelligent than our Mechanical counterparts - as let's face it anybody can turn a spanner!

Since the Puma HC Mk 2 has come into service during the latter part of August 2013, experience has grown and the Avionics Suite is performing well with very few glitches. We await future operations to see how well the aircraft can cope with extremes of temperature, humidity and the difference the aircrew will make with the inevitable generation of transient snags and finger trouble when making selections!

## History: 33 in the First World War, and the Great Escape!

Cpl Matt Beech, Sqn Historian

### The Great War:

On 12<sup>th</sup> January 1916, Major ( Later ACM) P B Joubert De La Ferte DSO took command of 33 Squadron at Filton Aerodrome in Bristol. He had aircraft with no engines, crates of engines that didn't fit the aircraft, one corporal and sixty men whose qualifications left a little to be desired! After sneaking some experienced men out of the hospital to bolster the squadrons numbers, 33 moved to Tadcaster in Yorkshire and, equipped with the Bristol F2b, became the world's first night fighter Squadron.

The engineers were billeted in a disused jam

factory which was within

100 yards of the airfield and the officers were quartered in the "Priests House" of a neighbouring estate. The Squadron's mission was to defend the Industrial Midlands (Leeds in particular) from the threat of Zeppelin Attack which had been causing alarm across the country. The aircraft however were not well suited to the job with no proper night flying equipment or radio, in fact the only means of navigation was to use the anti-aircraft search lights as a reference. They were first to attack the airships with 20lb bombs held in racks which were slung under the fuselage, these were however found to be quite dangerous during a hard landing, so a decision was made to use incendiary ammunition in the machine gun to take down the "Large Bag".



### WWII:

2014 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "The Great Escape", below are a few words on a member of 33 Squadron who was there:



On 16<sup>th</sup> September 1941, Flt Lt Don Edy RCAF glided down to Gerwala Landing Ground, Egypt, in his Hurricane ("Bunty", shown below with Don on top) to join 33 Fighter Squadron MEF (Middle East Forces). The missions were a mix of escort duties for reconnaissance and bombing raids to strafing German troop and supply columns as well as the inevitable run in

with the odd ME-109 or Italian CR-42.

33 Squadron had been hit hard since it had arrived in the desert and a within a nine day period they lost four pilots, two of them good friends of Don's. They moved constantly between Landing Grounds, at times only a few miles from the German Lines. One morning Don was charged with taking part in a strafing mission against a German column with three others; unfortunately Don was shot down by an ack-ack gun in the column but luckily managed a relatively smooth crash landing on the desert. He was soon picked up by the Germans. This was to be the start of another eventful journey.....

After a long arduous trip across the desert Don was herded onto a small steamer at Tripoli which the next morning was torpedoed by a British sub. He was blown out of the hold and up onto the deck where he abandoned the ship as it broke in two, and was eventually picked up by an Italian Cruiser along with many other survivors. They were taken to a POW camp in Sicily and then further into Europe until eventually on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1943 Don ended up in Stalag Luft III (famed for "The Great Escape") It was the largest



Air Force Officers camp in Germany and would be his home for the next year and a half. During that time the POW's took part in many activities such as gardening, cooking, theatrical shows and PT, obviously some of these provided excellent cover for the 'X' organisation to attempt many escapes. Don lived in hut 123, as shown second from the left in the photo below, which was the starting point for "Tom", It was a busy time living in a hut with a tunnel, watching out for "Goon" (guards) and obviously they gave up most of their bed boards to shore up the tunnels. "Tom" was found and destroyed however, so the focus switched to finishing "Harry" which on the night of March 24<sup>th</sup> 1944, 80 prisoners used to escape. Only three made it back to Britain, fifty of the escapees were captured by the Gestapo and executed. The Germans eventually marched Don and the remaining prisoners out of the camp but this didn't last for long and the Germans were forced to release them. On the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945 Don Edy was amongst hundreds of POW's who boarded Lancasters bound for Britain.

Don Edy's book "Goon in the Block" is available online and a copy can be viewed in the 33 Squadron history room.

## Reflections: Warrant Office Rick Burke-Smith

### "33 Squadron? What do they do?"

My 33 Squadron story begins with returning to the UK from a Loan Service Tour in the Sultanate of Oman. As usual dream sheets were completed stating aspirations for the next posting, which were duly submitted to manning with fingers crossed. This time I had made the fatal error of stating a negative choice (RAF St Athan), which as you can guess was exactly where I was posted. When I queried this I was told "Suck it up mate you have just been overseas for 4 years!!"

On arrival at St Athan, I picked the phone up to manning to ask when I could move, I was told there are 54 Chief Techs at St Athan, and 27 of them are pushing harder than you to get out, "You will have to do a year before we will post you!" One year later I rang back to request a posting,

"Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere." (Running a team dominated by civilians servicing Tornado F3s was beginning to make me seriously doubt my faith.)

"I have a slot coming up at Benson on 33 Squadron."

### "33 Squadron? What do they do?"

42 days later I arrived at Benson.

I arrived into the post of Rects Controller for A shift. Coming from the fast jet world, Support Helicopters was a real eye opener. I was immediately struck by the Squadron motto of "Loyalty", and it was also immediately evident that this was where the real work was being done in the Royal Air Force. The pace



and tempo was such that my peers had little time for a fast jet bloke, and it was clear I was going to have earn my place. I was confronted with cabs in fields that needed Eng Support, aircraft re-roles for daily tasking, nominating personnel to man deployments, cabs that wouldn't rotor tune, and spares that were scarcer than hen's teeth, (what no fatigue meter?). But I was also confronted with a work force that took



huge pride in what the Sqn did, were prepared to go the extra mile to achieve the aim, bound by a camaraderie I had not seen elsewhere in the Service.

My first trip away was to Kosovo, where it was a privilege to be part of such a superb outfit. We were plagued with problems, logistics, weather, infrastructure, but every night serviceable cabs were produced for the following day's tasking, regardless of how many hours it took to achieve the aim. As you

can tell already my loyalty and respect were growing daily for the respected 33 Squadron.

After a short spell on the dark side, I was promoted to FS and took charge of A shift. Our next significant trip away was to Mozambique for flood relief in February 2000. Once again this excellent Squadron rallied to the call and off we went to Africa. After an all day transit flight, the Engineers set too and rebuilt 2 aircraft overnight, so that on the following day puma's led by Wg Cdr Baz North were set to work. Over a 14 day period we lifted 725 personnel and 425 tons of aid with 4 aircraft, once again a superb effort by all involved.

This was then followed by our calling to Iraq. As acting WO under the command of Wg Cdr Paul Lyall, the Sqn deployed to Ali Al Salem in February 2003 in preparation for our move into Iraq. When the call came, after the insert of the Marines into the Al Faw peninsula; I deployed to the Northern FOB at Ramalyah, some 80 miles into Iraq, under the command of Sqn Ldr Reggie Pattle. Here once again the Sqn set about its business. There was no whinging, no whining, everybody set-to, did what they had to do, and quickly assumed the rhythm that the task demanded. Again faced with all the normal challenges of an SH det, infrastructure, spares, air worthiness challenges, we pulled together to achieve the task, the proudest moment of my career.

On return from Iraq, I was ready for a break and moved away from the Sqn for 3 years, something I regretted as soon as I did it because it was back to that other Airforce that I no longer relished since being part of SH. After promotion to Warrant Officer I was hunting down the 33 job and fortunately for me Tony Chown was moving on so the job was mine, couldn't think of a better place to be a Sqn Warrant Officer. It was here that I used to interview all Sqn arrivals and when asked "What does the Sqn do?", I would reply "You watch the 10 O'clock news, that's what we do!!" A phrase that I thought totally summed up the Sqn's ability.



I was fortunate enough to complete my service career at 33 Squadron, serving in total some 11 out of 38 years of service on the Sqn, the finest Squadron in the Royal Air Force. How lucky was I!

Loyalty.

## And Finally, War is Hell...

Photos depicting the harsh reality of 33 Sqn life on the Front Line: Wg Cdr Lyall shows the signs of strain during tasking just after the invasion of Iraq, 2003.

