

LOYALTY

The Newsletter of the Association of Number 33 Squadron, RAF



From the Editor.....

Welcome to the second edition of "Loyalty", the newsletter of the 33 Squadron RAF Association.

We're approaching the festive season, which traditionally begins on the last Friday of November with the fabled Puma Reunion, where many legends of the SH force gather to tell the same old stories, sing the same old socially unacceptable songs, drink lots of beer and bore our newer members with how much better/lower/punchier/tougher/colder/hotter/funnier and generally more manly the Puma force was before

GPS/Navs/Portaloos/Flares/SHASOs/JH C/Mr Blair and engine anticipators ruined it all. Happy hour does London really.....

Give it six months, and it'll all be forgotten, so what better way to keep those memories alive and learn new stuff from old dogs/find reasons for saying "It ain't like it used to be" than attending the next Association Reunion in May..... and in the meantime, enjoy this edition.

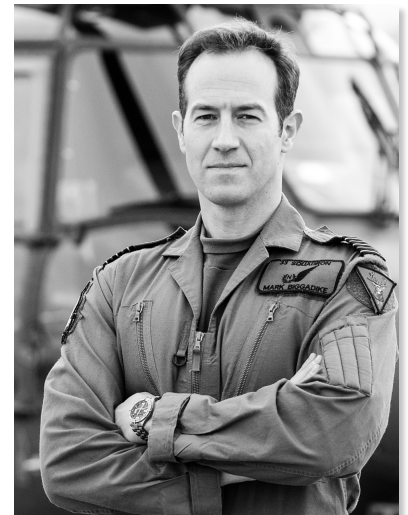
Paul Webster, Editor.



An Introduction from Wg Cdr Mark Biggadike, OC 33 Sqn, Chairman

After a year in post everything finally feels much more familiar...and as if to prove the point I sit writing this from yet another desert in the Middle East.

Fortunately on this occasion we're training - desert environmental training, as part of our continuing journey with Puma 2 to declaring Initial Operating Capability (IOC). The aircraft and crews are performing superbly and progress has been swift. Although the locations and tasks are familiar, there is a refreshingly new element to everything we're doing. The Puma 2 digital autopilot has allowed us to develop a new technique for landing in a degraded visual environment with far greater assurance. This capability puts Puma 2 firmly in a league of its own and we look forward to continuing to practice the new procedure in Norway in January prior to IOC. Additionally we have a new day and night Head Up Display (HUD) for use by the front crew, a moving-map tablet for wires avoidance and an imminent clearance for 2 x Puma 2 in C-17 – Father Christmas has been kind!



33 Sqn Centenary - 2016

We are a little over a year away from celebrating our centennial year and we would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to update Squadron brethren past and present on the plans for the centenary celebrations.

The aim is to stage a number of events throughout 2016 to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the formation of 33 Squadron. Plans are already being prepared for a formal dinner at the current Squadron headquarters here at RAF Benson which will be by invitation to current and former members of the Squadron. This will hopefully take place on, or as near as possible to, the formation date of 12th Jan 2016.

There will also be a late spring/early summer Squadron Party in 2016 which will be an afternoon and evening event for all personnel, their families and friends as well as all members of The 33 Squadron Association. The exact format and location is yet to be finalised but please keep a lookout for updates coming soon.

*Flt Lt Ellie Hoogewerf,
OIC Centenary Committee*



Away from the flying, Centenary plans continue to take shape (see left) with many exciting projects and ideas in the offing; 33 Sqn Centenary wine from Maison Sichel in Bordeaux (courtesy of our contact in The Worshipful Company of Founders), an exclusive and stunning Centenary watch from Bremont (further details in this edition) and plans for a Sqn memorial, a parade and a hangar dinner in January 2016, to name but a few.

I am pleased to report that your Association goes from strength to strength. We have now established our 100 'Founder Members' (who will be receiving their Founder pins very soon) and participation through our social media pages (Twitter, Facebook etc) continues to grow. Nevertheless, we still need to do more. I am aware that many ex-members of the Sqn have yet to join or are unaware of the Association's existence. Equally, although our digital communication is good (and improving) it would appear that some members are occasionally missing out on communications for some reason. The intention is certainly not to exclude anyone, so please be pro-active where possible and make sure the word is passed.

Although we are looking forward to marking a momentous year in 2016, next year is looking equally noteworthy and challenging for 33 Sqn and Puma 2. As we reach IOC and the potential for operational deployment looms against a backdrop of another Defence Spending Review and significant restructuring at RAF Benson, 33 Sqn will need its personnel (serving and ex) to provide their support and 'Loyalty' with even greater vigour. What better way to show your support and create an even stronger squadron 'family' than continuing to build the Association? I therefore ask you to contact those you know who are not currently members and point them in the right direction – in the meantime, thank you for your continued support and I look forward to catching up with you at the Puma Reunion at the end of this month.

Loyalty.

Wg Cdr Mark "Biggers" Biggadike
Association Chairman



Digging Up The Past

WO Eamon Geraghty, WO Eng

After years and years of constant battling with PriDE and the MSS budget manager Cpl Mark Peerman (Puma Force Hangar Manager) has finally brokered a deal to have the D hangar floor completely re-surfaced. Work is underway as I write and is scheduled to be completed in the New Year, in plenty of time for our centenary celebrations. Many of you may well remember the various repair works that have been carried out in the hangar resulting in the unsightly patchwork effect we have today; clearly not a fitting arena for the premier Puma 2 sqn to undertake engineering business on. Watching the contractors dig up the first test pieces today almost makes you feel like you are in an episode of Tony Robinson's Time Team, as the various layers are peeled away revealing the different coloured floor coverings of yesteryear, slowly exposing the hidden footprints of our past members and the memories which they hold. Sadly, unlike the Berlin Wall, we won't be able to sell off pieces, as goodness knows what (or who?!) is trapped between the layers!



EPM – The New Kid On The Block

Chief Tech Andy Thornton, EPM

So, what is an EPM I hear you ask?

The official line is Engineering Programme Manager, but what do they do? Apart from being suave, sophisticated and the font of all knowledge (I wrote this myself remember) the EPM is responsible for maintaining close liaison with the Sqn Duty Authorisers (DA), Line and Rectification controllers, P2MF and Engineering Management in respect of flying programme requirements and aircraft serviceability. Phew!!

He or she plans to maximize aircraft availability to meet operational tasking and establish the following weeks flying programme. The aim is to optimize the flying programme in consultation with the DA and streamline the engineering effort required to ensure asset utilization is as high as possible. Ultimately they are the engineers' chief fire-fighters, making quick decisions, switching assets and trying to maintain equilibrium between ground and aircrew crew. Not any easy task!!

So there we have it ladies and gentlemen, the Engineering Programme Manager.

The Puma Years

Flt Lt Paul Spiers, Aircrew Rep



The Squadron Motto, 'Loyalty', is exhibited by all Squadron members as much in more recent times as it ever has been during its reasonably busy 98 years since formation. The next few paragraphs feature some of the monumental events that have taken place during the tenure of one particular aircraft type, the mighty Puma.

Since June 1971, the Squadron operated the Puma HC Mk 1 helicopter, first at RAF Odiham and then, more recently at RAF Benson. No 33 Squadron played a significant role with both NATO and the ACE Mobile Force (Land) (AMFL) in support of land forces.

For 20 years, the Squadron maintained a detachment in Northern Ireland and saw active duty in Belize, Zimbabwe (in support of the Cease Fire Monitoring Force), Ascension Island, Venezuela, Jamaica (to aid disaster relief) and both Gulf Wars.

The RAF Puma (Middle East) Squadron was created in 1990 when both 33 and 230 Squadrons were put on standby for the Gulf. By early January 1991, the Squadron was on active duty providing casualty evacuation for the 7th Armoured Brigade. Deployed forward during the ground war, 33 Squadron had a forward operating base in Iraq. By the end of the war, the mainly 'pink' Pumas had flown over 1200 sorties, carried over 4000 troops, evacuated over 160 casualties and delivered 68000 kilograms of freight. Throughout 1993 and 1994, the situation in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia continued to worsen and in 1995, 33 Squadron deployed as part of the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) in an attempt to stabilize the region. Based in Ploce, Croatia, the 6 Pumas were tasked to provide troop lift and airborne command and control. For 3 months the Squadron conducted flights throughout Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. With the signing of the Dayton Accord in 1995, the RRF was repatriated in November 1995. The Squadron also sent a flight of 4 Pumas and 70 Personnel to the Congo in May 1997. Violence was likely following the departure of Zaire's president Mobutu and 33 Squadron was on hand to provide lift capability should Commonwealth civilians need to be evacuated from the Zairian capital of Kinshasa. The transition of power was a peaceful one however, and the Squadron returned home at the end of May.

In June 1997, 33 Squadron took up residence at RAF Benson, and was joined in February 1998 by the Operational Conversion Flight, formerly part of 27 Sqn.

Since moving to Benson, the Squadron has supported operations in Macedonia (1999), Kosovo (1999-2002), Mozambique (2000), Bosnia (2001-2002), Afghanistan (2002) and Iraq (2003-2008). The Squadron played a leading role on Op TELIC in Iraq in 2003, participating in the assault of the Al-Faw peninsula and securing the Southern city of Basra and its surrounding area including the Ramaylah oil fields. The Squadron then maintained a presence in and around Baghdad until cessation of operations in Iraq in 2009. From 2010-2013 the Squadron supported the British Army as part of Exercise ASKARI THUNDER in Kenya. Additionally, during the summer of 2012 the Squadron also played a key role in the implementation of the Air Security Plan for the London Olympic Games. In Dec 2012, 33 Squadron flew its last Puma HC Mk1 sortie before beginning the transition to the upgraded Puma HC Mk2.

33 Squadron's colourful history, encompassing many types of aircraft and roles underscores the proud tradition that we maintain today. Whether assisting civilian authorities in times of crisis or supporting UK land forces, the Squadron continues to play a significant role within the RAF. Currently we are equipped with the newly upgraded Puma HC Mk 2 helicopter. The Mk 2 is a significant upgrade on the Mk 1, encompassing new engines and an additional fuel tank, with associated increased power and range, as well as a glass cockpit with a fully integrated Flight Management System and Automatic Flying Control System. We expect Puma 2 will continue to deliver as we develop the aircraft towards Full Operational Capability (FOC) and prepare to deploy on any future operations. We have now fully converted all Puma HC Mk 1 crews and have recently started to train our first ab-initio students. We are very much looking forward to when the next piece of history begins.



A Puma HC Mk2 is put to bed on Exercise Hotblade 2014 in Portugal

History: 33 in the First and Second World Wars

Cpl Matt Beech, Sqn Historian

In 1916, 33 Squadron was involved in Home Defence against the German Zeppelin Airships and operated with a number of different aircraft, the first of which was the “Royal Aircraft Factory - BE2c”. This bi-plane had a conventional 2 seater layout with the engine at the front, but the pilot occupied the rear seat so the aircraft could be flown without the observer/gunner if needs be, thus keeping the C of G within limits. The aircrafts design was the work of Geoffrey de Havilland (famous Mosquito designer) and the mark flown by 33 included such luxuries as ailerons! Previous marks used a system of cables to “warp” the wings to roll the aircraft. As we took on the night fighter role (the first squadron to do so!) our aircraft were changed to single seater BE2cs so a fuel tank replaced the observer to keep the weight over the C of G. After an initial lack of success while using darts and small incendiary bombs to attack airships from above, a Lewis gun was mounted to fire a mixture of explosive and incendiary ammunition upwards, at an angle of 45°, to attack the airship from below.



BE2c in the Imperial War Museum, London

In 1943 whilst still fighting in the Western Desert the squadron took delivery of its first Spitfires. They were MkVB's with a supercharged V12 Merlin engine, a Max speed of 370 mph and a climb rate of 2,600 ft/min. The MkV was the most common Spitfire produced and the "B" meant they were fitted with the "B wing" which housed the best combination of weaponry; 2 x 20mm cannons and 4 x .303 Browning machine guns meaning it easily outgunned its German and Italian foe in the desert. By April 1944 the Squadron was on a ship and on its way home, reforming at RAF North Weald in Essex to become part of No 135 Wing engaged in bomber escort and fighter-bomber missions. This time equipped with the Spitfire LF MkIXE. The LF meant the engine was better suited to low-level performance and the E meant we had the "E" wing, this was a development to allow the aircraft to house alongside the 20mm cannon a .50in heavy machine gun and we were going to need them. In the following weeks the Squadron moved gradually closer to the south coast, first to Lympne in Kent and then onto Tangmere. It was from here that 33 Squadron provided fighter cover to the D-Day landings, the aircrews were given their new aircraft with freshly painted invasion stripes and the groundcrew collected new tools and a choice of rifle or sten-gun.

Later in October the squadron moved across to France as a fighter bomber unit participating in attacks on V-1 bomb sights, escorting bombers on daylight raids and engaging in rail interdiction operations in France and Belgium.



MH434, an example of a Spitfire LF MkIXE still flies today.

The Digital Age is Upon Us

MAcr Gareth Attridge, Digital Media Rep



Question: Do wine and technology mix?

Well in this instance yes.

For those of you who are reasonably spammed-up on the wonderful wide world of the internet (and if you are reading this electronically I will assume you are), then you may have noticed an increased involvement by 33 Sqn with those two little words that sends dread through nearly every person over a certain age. No, not "last orders", I am talking about Social Media. If you were not already aware, we now have an online Closed Group (invitation only) on Facebook called "33 Sqn Past & Present".

The idea of this group is to provide a platform where Association members alongside current Sqn personnel can post and share experiences both past and present in a controlled environment as well as exchange information with regards to events and happenings connected with 33 Sqn. We have to adhere to the standard safety and security rules laid down by Facebook but the Admin team can keep tabs on who has access to the page and approve its content. So far there have been some great photos and memories from the past appearing and several people have got back in touch with each other as a result of joining.

Previous to this there was a great page that was for Association members only but given that we wanted to increase the reach to non-members to try and encourage them to join, the committee decided to hand over the reigns to me as the group originator and combine efforts into one page. As I type we are currently at 280 members with new applications to join every day.

If you haven't joined in yet (why not?!) then type in a search on Facebook for:

33 Squadron Past & Present

If you bring your gadgetry to the Reunion in London, I'll even get you all set up. For a small liquid fee of course!

So what has this got to do with wine then? Well the observant ones amongst you will have noticed OC 33's comment about the fantastic Bordeaux Centenary Wine being produced for the Sqn for our 100 Year Anniversary in 2016.

If you were fortunate enough to place an order then by way of a small update I can type the following on behalf of Flight Sergeant Nick Upton:

As of January 2015 we will be able to receive payments in the following format:

BACS payment (secure)

Cheque

Cash

Mess Bill (Benson personnel)

As stated, more detail will appear on the Facebook page in early 2015, including contact details for Nick where banking details can be passed securely. If you placed an order online, please make sure that you are in a position to make full payment as soon as possible as we have to pay for the wine in advance.

Watch This Space!

See what I did there?! As mentioned in OC33's introduction, the Sqn has commissioned a stunning new Centenary Watch from the all British Bremont Watch Company (<http://www.bremont.com/military>) This is a chance to own a fantastic limited edition prestige watch with an incredible once only saving on the normal retail price.

There are more details on the Facebook Past & Present page but for more details you can also contact Flt Lt Steve Mills who is the coordinator for the project - BEN-33Sqn-A-Pilot3@mod.uk

The images below are a representation of the proposed watches. There are a number of options available.



The watch face design incorporates 3 x dials depicting aircraft operated by 33 Sqn as well as the Sqn Crest and 100 logo



And Finally...

Chf Tech Paul Davies, Membership Secretary

The membership recently passed the momentous milestone figure of one hundred members and currently stands at one hundred and two. Hopefully, as we mature as an Association and word spreads of the good things that are planned for the future, we can gain even more members. With your help we can achieve this so please tell ex 33 Squadron friends about the Association and we will continue to go from strength to strength.

I recently emailed the membership to confirm the details that are held on the database are accurate and up to date. For those of you who have responded a big thank you. If you are yet to respond please do so at your earliest convenience. The Membership pin badges are due soon and without the correct details I am unable to send it to you.

2015 promises to be a good year with the Annual Reunion planned for May/June. The venue is TBC but the Ents Rep is working hard behind the scenes and will let the membership know in due course. This will, of course, be a dress rehearsal for 2016 when the Sqn celebrates 100 years of Loyalty. I have the honour of representing the Association on the committee that has been formed to bring together the various aspects of the celebrations. If you have any ideas please forward them to me and I will ensure the Association is well represented.

Finally, if your contact details change, please contact me and keep me updated. I can be contacted at Paul Davies, 33 Sqn Association Membership Secretary, 4 Battle Road, Benson, OXON, OX10 6DS. BEN-PDSHP2EDITAVTS1@mod.uk

