

# RAF 100 CELEBRATIONS SAINT-OMER

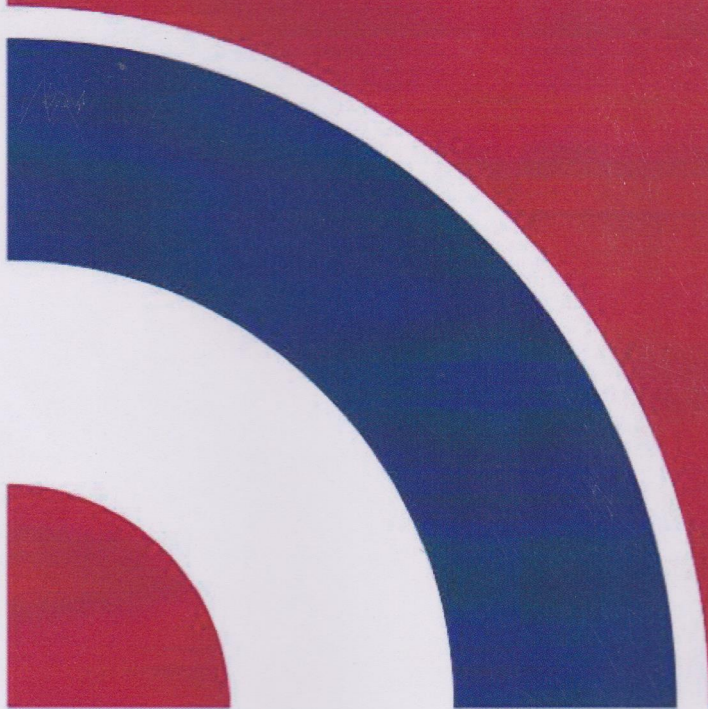


THURSDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2018



RAF

100



# ITINERARY

## Thursday 20 September 2018

11:00-12:30

**Saint-Omer Cathedrale**  
*Service of Commemoration*

12:45-15:00

**Motte Castrale**  
*Lunch – All Units detailed Annex B of AO*  
**Chapel of the Jesuits, Saint-Omer**  
*Exhibition “1918-2018: RAF born in Saint Omer”*

16:15-17:00

**Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery**  
*Memorial Service*

17:35-17:50

**Saint-Omer Aerodrome**  
*206 Squadron Flypast*

18:00-19:30

**Saint-Omer Aerodrome**  
*Official Ceremony*

19:30-22:00

**Saint-Omer Aerodrome**  
*Official Reception*

## HISTORICAL NOTE

It is entirely appropriate that the Centenary year of the Royal Air Force (RAF) also falls on the Centenary of the end of the First World War. It was that cataclysmic conflict which not only gave birth to the RAF, but created the political and geopolitical landscape which defined much of the century that followed and which therefore profoundly affected where, how and why the Service operated in the years that followed, up to and including the present day.

The chain of events which led to the creation of the World's first independent Air Force began with the appearance of a formation of German *Gotha* bombers over London in the summer of 1917. The fact that the enemy could fly over the Capital in broad daylight with apparent impunity caused a political storm in a country hitherto isolated from direct enemy action by the sea and the unassailable strength of the Royal Navy. The Prime Minister appointed Lieutenant General Jan Christian Smuts to investigate and Smuts quickly recommended the amalgamation of the existing Army and Naval air arms to form a separate Air Force with its own staff.

In late 1917 General Hugh Trenchard, serving as Commander of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in France, was based at **Saint-Omer** with the forward deployed squadrons of the RFC. It is here that some of his inspiration for the organisation and leadership of the shortly-to-be-created RAF of April 1918 is believed to have been formed.

Brought into formal existence on the 1 April 1918 the RAF began life as the world's first and premier Air Force and it has been at the forefront of military aviation from that day to this. Its official birth came in the middle of a significant German offensive on the Western Front and its first week was marked by ferocious fighting as RAF aircraft played a leading role in stemming the German tide. In the ensuing months aircraft provided crucial support as the Army, in concert with French and American allies, drove the Germans back to the brink of the Rhine bringing the War to a triumphant close. On the Western Front, in Italy, the Balkans and the Middle East, and in the war against the U-boats, the RAF proved crucial to victory.

The world was a less stable place post-1918 and it may surprise many to learn of the myriad countries and regions in which the RAF operated in the period between the First and Second World Wars, including Russia, Mesopotamia [Iraq], Palestine [Israel], Afghanistan, India [and modern-day Pakistan] Sudan, and even China. Aircraft conducted reconnaissance, flew bombing missions, moved political officers and if necessary troops to trouble spots rapidly and efficiently, and evacuated civilians when events turned hostile.

In the 1930s the Service faced a resurgent threat which led to a renewed emphasis on staying at the forefront technologically. The RAF created the world's first air defence system integrating radar, telecommunications and radio which was applied triumphantly by Fighter Command in the Battle of Britain; a battle fought for the first time entirely in the sky but won not simply by valour in the air, but in part by technology and organisation on the ground. The War was once again global. Europe, Africa, the Middle and Far East all saw fighting on a scale previously unimaginable. Whether it was in the defence of Malta, in the deserts and mountains of North and East Africa, or the jungles of Burma, in Italy and the Balkans, the RAF quite literally rose to the challenge. The renewed threat on the sea was met by the constant endeavours of the maritime aircraft quartering the ocean expanse. The struggle was unceasing, nowhere more so than in the skies over Europe. Here the struggle for air superiority was unremitting, whilst reconnaissance pilots photographed much of the continent as a necessary adjunct both to the D-Day invasion, itself heavily reliant on tactical

air power, and the combined bomber offensive. The latter saw German industry maimed, the continental rail system crippled, and the Third Reich's oil supplies reduced to a trickle, such that what remained of the *Luftwaffe* could not fly and the much-vaunted panzer divisions could not manoeuvre. The cost was grievous, 55,000 men of Bomber Command perished taking the fight to the enemy.

The post-war World was little more comforting as the threat of Communist domination posed a new threat. The RAF played a notable early role in preserving democracy in Western Europe during the Berlin Airlift, maintaining the West's position in the city in concert with the USAF. The threat to Europe continued through the following decades, where the Service played its part through the ceaseless maintenance of the nuclear deterrent, and policing the nation's airspace and waters against Soviet incursions. In Germany too, it helped maintain NATO's position and thus played no small part in the final collapse of communism and the reunification of that nation and the restoration of democracy to Eastern Europe. The Falkland's Campaign of 1982 saw extraordinary air enabled events, most notably Op BLACK BUCK and the long-range ground attacks flown from by Vulcans from the UK. The Service was also a significant factor in the orderly withdrawal and transfer of power and continuing support to friendly nations in the Middle and Far East.

Not least of the RAF's contributions over the decades has been in humanitarian operations. From airlifting threatened civilians from Kabul in 1928 and 1929, through food drops to the famine hit areas in Burma, Nepal, Ethiopia and other nations, and relief operations come flood or tempest, hurricane or tsunami, be it the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean, the Philippines or Bangladesh, or indeed in Britain itself, the RAF has always been amongst the first to respond bringing hope as well as more tangible assistance. In Britain the RAF also ran the Air Sea Rescue service from the Second World War utilising initially marine craft and aircraft and latterly helicopters until the disbandment of the ASR force and its transfer to civilian contractors in 2016.

The last three decades have seen the Royal Air Force returning to operate in some areas of the World which would have been familiar to the airmen's grandfathers and great-grandfathers, from Iraq to Afghanistan, and Libya to Syria. The threat may change but the need for courage and a resolute determination to meet and defeat the Nation's enemies head on remains the same as it did throughout the intervening century.



# A Celebration of 100 Years



Thursday 20 September 2018

Aérodrome de Saint-Omer Wizernes

## HISTORICAL NOTE

On 8 October 1914, The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) arrived in Saint-Omer and a headquarters was established at the aerodrome next to the local race course. For the following four years, Saint-Omer was a focal point for all RFC operations in the field. Although most squadrons only used Saint-Omer as a transit camp before moving on to other locations, the base grew in importance as it increased its logistic support to the RFC.

Many Royal Air Force squadrons can trace their roots to formation at Saint-Omer during this period. Among which are No. IX Squadron RAF which was formed at Saint-Omer, 14 December 1914 and No. 16 Squadron RAF which was formed on 10 February 1915.

41 Squadron, then RFC, deployed to Saint-Omer on 15 October 1916 flying F.E.8 aircraft. The Squadron still operates today, at RAF Coningsby, as the Royal Air Force's Fast Jet Test & Evaluation Squadron, and the Squadron crest adopted in 1937 still today sports the Double Armed Cross, found within the Arms of the town of Saint-Omer. The aircraft of 41 Squadron, by then S.E.5a fighters, left Bruyères airfield on 20 September 1918, 100 years ago to this day.



***A C130J from 206 Sqn will perform a flypast over  
the Aerodrome between 1735-1750hrs***

## ORDER OF SERVICE

Conducted by  
*The Reverend (Wing Commander) David Norfield RAF*

Parade Commander  
*Wg Cdr Andrew Eccleston RAF*

**Parade will form up and personnel will be seated by 1800**

The Royal Air Force Silk Ensign  
and The Standard of the Royal Air Force Cadets  
will be paraded to the memorial

**Tornado GR4 Flypast**  
IX(B) Squadron

### **The National Anthem**

God save our gracious Queen,  
Long live our noble Queen,  
God save the Queen!  
Send her victorious,  
Happy and glorious,  
Long to reign over us,  
God save the Queen!

Thy choicest gifts in store  
On her be pleased to pour,  
Long may she reign:  
May she defend our laws,  
And ever give us cause  
To sing with heart and voice  
God save the Queen!

### **La Marseillaise**

Allons ! Enfants de la Patrie !  
Le jour de gloire est arrivé !  
Contre nous de la tyrannie,  
L'étendard sanglant est levé ! (Bis)  
Entendez-vous dans les campagnes  
Mugir ces féroces soldats ?  
Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras  
Égorger vos fils, vos compagnes

Aux armes, citoyens !  
Formez vos bataillons !  
Marchons, marchons !  
Qu'un sang impur...  
Abreuve nos sillons !

**Rafale Flypast**  
24 La-Fayette Squadron Escadron



## Welcome

Air Vice-Marshal Dr Peter Dye OBE RAF (Ret'd)

### Per Noctem Volamus

*Read by Squadron Leader Colin Bostrom RAF  
and in French by Group Captain Tim Below RAF*

We fly by night,  
We challenge the unknown  
And we hope we do not die  
Before 'wild oats' are sown.

We fly by night  
Into the fearful dark  
And hope that we get home  
'Ere wakes the morning lark.

We fly by night,  
Perhaps we'll never learn.  
We hope that we get back  
And pray it's not "our turn".

*Written by Sergeant Jim Brookbank,  
IX(B) Sqn Second World War bomb aimer*

### Testimonial speeches

The Viscount Lord Trenchard

**41 Squadron** - Air Marshal Sir Chris Harper KBE RAF (Retd)

**IX(B) Squadron, Historical Notes** - Chief Technician Rob Swanson RAF

*Lord, Monsieur le Maire, Mesdames et Messieurs,  
Mon nom est Robert Swanson, Sergent-chef, et je suis ingénieur au sein de l'escadron IX  
(de bombardement), et je vous souhaite la bienvenue à l'aérodrome de Saint-Omer. Je n'ai  
pas eu le plaisir de revenir à Saint-Omer depuis les commémorations du centenaire de la  
Première Guerre mondiale fin 2014, mais je parle au nom de tous les membres de  
l'escadron 9, passés ou actuels, en disant que l'on s'y sent comme à la maison.  
Lorsque l'on m'a invité à faire un discours au nom de l'escadron, ce fut un honneur, je n'ai  
pas eu besoin de réfléchir très longtemps pour accepter.  
L'escadron 9 « Wireless » a été formé ici-même à Saint-Omer le 8 décembre 1914. Ce fut le  
premier escadron du Royal Flying Corps à être formé en dehors du Royaume-Uni, 22 jours  
avant l'escadron 8, non pas quelqu'un compte...*

*L'escadron a été formé dès les premiers vols en liaison radio avec le quartier général du  
Royal Flying Corps à Saint-Omer, sous les ordres du Commandant Herbert Musgrave, avec  
des BE2A. Musgrave était un brillant vétéran qui avait été décoré pour ses actes durant la  
guerre d'Afrique du Sud et faisait figure de pionnier en matière de communications sans fil.  
Musgrave, aux côtés de 2 officiers exceptionnels, le Capitaine James et le Capitaine Lewis,  
ont joué un rôle déterminant dans le développement et l'intégration de la technologie sans fil*

*à bord des aéronefs. Malheureusement, aucun des trois n'a survécu, ce qui nous rappelle combien la Première Guerre mondiale, mais aussi les débuts de l'aviation, ont été destructeurs.*

*Sous le commandement de Musgrave, l'escadron 9 a rapidement été considéré comme le chef de file quant à l'application et à l'utilisation des communications sans fil. Les connaissances développées et les innovations réalisées furent rapidement adoptées par l'armée britannique et la Royal Navy. Pour son travail acharné et ses qualités de meneur hors pair aux prémices de l'escadron 9, le Commandant Musgrave a reçu l'ordre du Service distingué. L'utilisation nouvelle des communications sans fil a également contribué à la renommée du successeur de Musgrave, au sein de l'OCIX, ici à Saint-Omer, un certain Commandant Hugh Caswell Tremeneere Dowding, devenu chef du Fighter Command et le principal artisan du succès de la bataille d'Angleterre ; quelque chose dont seront sans doute très fiers nos successeurs dotés de Typhoon.*

*Lorsque je suis monté à bord du train hier à Folkestone, 35 minutes plus tard, j'étais à Calais, et moins d'une heure plus tard, j'étais ici à Saint-Omer. Il est facile de prendre tout ce qui a changé en 104 années pour acquis. Mais pour les pionniers qui ont quitté les différents aérodromes du sud de l'Angleterre pour traverser la Manche, c'était une toute autre histoire.*

*Imaginez... Traversez la Manche, tournez à droite lorsque vous arrivez sur la côte, progressez un peu à l'intérieur des terres et cherchez un aérodrome. Il n'est guère surprenant que certains aient fait demi-tour, que d'autres se soient perdus ou aient atterri n'importe où et aient demandé leur chemin, et que d'autres aient été portés disparus. Il faut bien garder à l'esprit que seulement 11 ans auparavant, les frères Wright effectuaient le premier vol motorisé, et seulement 5 ans auparavant, on réussissait la première traversée de la Manche.*

*Parmi ces pilotes peu expérimentés, les plus chanceux avaient eu droit à plus de 10 heures d'entraînement avant d'être envoyés de l'autre côté de la Manche, afin de rejoindre ce tout nouvel escadron, le numéro 9, à Saint-Omer. Ces hommes furent les pionniers d'une nouvelle ère militaire.*

*Malheureusement, après leur arrivée, les problèmes sont allés bon train tandis que le Royal Flying Corps faisait face aux sévères critiques des généraux de l'armée, qui imaginaient alors que l'aviation ne jouerait qu'un rôle de reconnaissance très limité en temps de guerre. Heureusement, les armes et les tactiques actuelles de la Royal Air Force ont quelque peu évolué !*

*Même si le rôle actuel de l'escadron 9 est complètement différent, certains des principes de base de la technologie sans fil sont encore employés aujourd'hui, et le resteront pendant un certain temps encore, et nous avons en quelque sorte une dette envers ces pionniers qui ont cru en l'aviation militaire.*

*Et pour l'anecdote, Saint-Omer a une signification personnelle pour moi. Mon arrière grand-oncle a servi dans l'armée, sur le front ouest, et lorsqu'il a été blessé, il a été soigné dans l'un des nombreux hôpitaux de la région avant d'être rapatrié au Royaume-Uni. Ainsi, pour moi, et pour l'escadron 9, ce lieu sera toujours spécial. L'importance de Saint-Omer durant la Première Guerre mondiale, autant pour son aérodrome, son rôle de base opérationnelle avancée et de centre de tri, n'est plus à démontrer et cette ville occupe une place toute particulière dans l'histoire de l'aviation militaire britannique.*

## The Act of Remembrance

Let us remember before God, and commend to his sure keeping:  
those who have died for their country in war; those whom we knew, and whose memory we  
treasure; and all who have lived and died in the service of humanity.

*Squadron Leader Aidy Woolven RAF, 206 Sqn Executive Officer, will then lead the  
Commemoration*

They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.

**We will remember them.**



The Last Post

Silence

Reveille

Laying of Official Wreaths  
Others may be laid at the end of the service



### Official Speeches

Genevieve Darrieussecq  
Secretary of State of War Veterans

Air Marshal Stuart Evans CBE RAF  
Deputy Commander AIRCOM, NATO

Air Vice-Marshal Didier Rouzet  
Inspecteur adjoint à l'inspection de l'armée de l'air

François Decoster  
Mayor of Saint-Omer and  
President of Saint-Omer County

## **“Omer Drome” Song**

RAF Air Cadet Flight Sergeant Jack Beaney

I've got a windy feeling round my heart  
And it's time that we went home!  
I've got a great big longing to depart  
Somewhere back to Omer Drome  
Huns are diving at my tail  
Wind up – Gee! – I've got a gale  
Guns are jamming  
Pilots are damning  
Archies bursting all around us  
And observers say  
'Ain't it time that we came down?'  
So won't you splitass back  
Along the track  
To my dear old Omer Town?

*Royal Flying Corps song, circa 1916, sung to the tune of 'My Old Kentucky Home'*

## **Unveiling of the Memorial Plaque**

### **Closing Prayer**

### **The Blessing**

The Standards are Marched Off

### **End of Ceremony**

***Individual units are invited to lay wreaths at the memorial  
prior to proceeding to the Reception***