

MINUTES OF THE WINTER AREA CONFERENCE HELD AT
ATHERTON BRANCH
ON JANUARY 26th 2008

The delegates were welcomed to conference by the Mayor of Wigan, Councillor John O'Brien. Wishing the delegates a good conference the Mayor recalled his service days in the RAF, but more recently, his visit to the HM Submarine base in Faslane: a rather enjoyable experience. The Area President having thanked the Mayor for opening our Annual General meeting, and winter conference presented him with the latest edition of the Area magazine, and escorted him to his waiting car. The Area Chairman S/m D Tollerton then commenced the proceedings at 1235 calling first for the customary one minute's silence to remember the following shipmates who had crossed the bar since our last meeting.

S/m Brian Fisher (Treasurer Atherton Branch)
S/m Ellis Bailey (Chairman Bolton branch)
S/m George Booth (Secretary Ellesmere Port Branch)
S/m Bill Stocker (Hazel Grove)
S/m Roy Dickinson (Area committee & North Manchester Branch)
S/ms Fred Standring (Branch Vice Chairman, and S/m Dorothy Crain (Peel)
S/m Margaret Weaver (Secretary Rhyl Branch)
S/ms D Dwyer and Bill Wright (Runcorn)
S/m Bill Clarke (Skelmersdale)
S/m Mrs Marjorie Poynton (Trafford)
S/m Walter Elliot (Whitehaven)

Apologies had been received from the Deeside, Ellesmere Port, Peel St Helens and Whitehaven branches

The Area Chairman S/m David Tollerton (Crosby) proceeding with the winter Area conference; commenced by thanking those branches who had voted for him in the recent election of Officers. He hoped to continue the good work by our late Area Chairman, S/m John Dixon, although he would be a hard act to follow.

The minutes of the Area conference hosted by the North Manchester Branch on October 27th 2007 were taken as read.

Proposed by; S/m C Fay (Chester) and seconded by S/m Pilkington (Atherton)

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

01/08 There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

CORRESPONDENCE

02/08 Peter Wilkie (Atherton) has, very kindly sent me a copy of a letter he addressed to the General Secretary expressing his branch member's misgivings on the way the Association is heading, and the dictatorial attitudes emanating from Headquarters. This well written letter sums up all that is apparently going wrong in the RNA. Peter has had a reply to his letter; putting it mildly, several of the General Secretary's remarks were offensive to say the least. Is it any wonder shipmates with the Association losing members by the thousands, that we have arrived at this sorry state in our history when our elected, - and dare I say it –our unelected masters are more concerned in internal politics whilst the RNA withers on the vine.

The correspondence this quarter shipmates, has been dominated by this issue. It was discussed at the December meeting of the National Council, where it is reported, that the General Secretary refused to apologise for the tone of his letter to this Area and S/m Wilkie.

A similar ill tempered reply by the General Secretary was also made to the Secretary of the Congleton Branch in response to his letter when he attempted to bring to the attention of the hierarchy the problems affecting the RNA. This in turn prompted an emergency meeting of the Area committee to discuss our next course of action, which included a recommendation from this committee requesting branches within this Area to withhold their Headquarters subscriptions pending the outcome of the issue. Both the deputy President, and the Association Chairman, along with two National Council members from other Areas have made several requests to visit the Area and to speak with the members of the Area committee. The consensus of the Area committee is this would serve no useful purpose, at this time, as the National Council are to meet at *HMS Eaglet* in late March when members of this committee will be invited to meet the National Council post meeting. Also at the emergency meeting of the Area committee it was decided to make one last attempt to persuade the General Secretary to acknowledge that his replies to the letters were both rude and ill tempered. To this end, I wrote to the Association President, repeated to the National Chairman and Deputy President expressing our thoughts on the matter. This prompted a response from the President and the National Chairman both of whom promised to intervene in the dispute. I can now report that S/m Wilkie has received a grudging apology from the General Secretary, and there the matter rests. I am sure that our Area President and our DNCM may wish to add to the foregoing during the course of this meeting. The latest in this saga is the appearance of a further letter from the National President reiterating the desire of a delegation from the National Council to meet members of our Area committee "to address the many misapprehensions in this Area". This has been backed up by several telephone calls from the deputy President and Chairman on the same subject.

For the record, a similar letter sent by the Crosby Branch Secretary, and now our Area Chairman, expressing many of the points raised by Atherton has been addressed to the National President, National Chairman, and the General Secretary.

I have received a letter from S/m Howard of the St Helens Branch who advises caution on the withholding of subscriptions. If we withhold the subscriptions after March 31st our membership with the Association will cease. We should think carefully before embarking on that course of action

A further letter on this subject, from S/m Woods of the North Manchester Branch urges our NCM to be more forceful at National Council meetings; and if necessary and should withdraw if the unelected members of Council attempt to dictate the course of these

meetings.

The General Secretary has written to the Chairmen of the Runcorn and Kirkby branches concerning the recent deregistration of their clubs. It outlines the steps they should follow to successfully wind up their club's affairs to the satisfaction of all the interested parties.

I understand that due to the recent spate of RNA club closures, has prompted an emergency meeting of the clubs sub committee of the National Council. Of course, no mention of this was disclosed to the membership as a whole, and no doubt the meeting's outcome may well be censured also.

I regret to announce, due to falling membership and compounded by the death of their long serving Secretary, the Ellesmere Port branch was unable to continue, and has disbanded as from December 31st 2007.

S/m Mercer of the Runcorn Branch has sent me details of the Federation of Naval Associations Reunion at Lyme Bay on Friday February 29th until Monday March 3rd at a cost of £80 per person Half Board. Further information about this is available from S/m Mercer.

Several Branch Secretary Changes have taken place since our last meeting; these will be shown in the minutes of this meeting.

The Hazel Grove Branch will hold their annual Memorial Service and Parade to commemorate the loss of the convoy rescue vessel, *SS Stockport* on Sunday February 24th Those attending, muster at Hazel Grove Rail station at 1200

S/m Hawkshaw of the Southport branch plans to stage a Veterans Day once more this year on Sunday June 29th.in Princess Park Southport. Unfortunately, this date conflicts with the National Conference weekend in Dundee. However, for those who wish to attend, there promises to be more attractions than last year, including displays by the Army and a memorial fly past and Helicopter display. Further details of this event when confirmed, will be posted on the Area website

I have been informed by the Savoy Hotel in Blackpool that the hotel is now fully booked for our spring conference and reunion weekend on April 25th -28th. Several members of the Area committee will be meeting the hotel management shortly to finalise the weekend arrangements.

AREA TREASURER

03/08 S/m Brocking said he had nothing further to add to his report given earlier at the Annual General Meeting.

NCM's REPORT

04/08 S/m R Fielding commenced his report by saying that the December meeting of the National Council; a great deal of time was taken up discussing the subject mentioned earlier in the Secretary's correspondence concerning this Area's dissatisfaction with the General Secretary's recent actions. The General Secretary had made it clear in no uncertain terms that he would not under any circumstances, apologise for his actions. However, he has since made a written apology to S/m Wilkie and hopefully we can now

regard the matter as closed. Suffice to say, the President and Deputy President consider the General Secretary as "invaluable to the Association". S/m Fielding added, that it was the General Secretary's intention to retire in September, and National Council are being urged to start the process of recruiting his successor.

He did not agree to a suggestion from a shipmate who had written to the Area suggesting he should withdraw from the Council meetings if the unelected members attempted to control their meetings. To withdraw from the meeting would serve no useful purpose, and it would deprive this Area of a vote on the proceedings. However, several NCM's are now querying certain matters voiced by the President and General Secretary, which previously would be voted for without question.

The re-location of headquarters to Portsmouth is proceeding, with the working party looking at various sites with an option to buy freehold instead of leasing. The costs so far expended amount to £8,000 however this would be recouped with the sale of Chelsea Manor Street if suitable premises are found at a reasonable price.

The total assets of the Association as at December 31st 2007 amounted to £1,789,00, 000 the deficit for the year was £40,000 90. and the projected deficit for the present year is £26,450 00 The budget for the coming year is £287,0045 One item that is already over budget is the Legal Expenses which has a projected budget for the coming year of £6,000. Already, £8,500 has been expended because National Council have been requested by the Monmouth and No7 Area to pursue through the courts a case involving a former member of a South Wales branch who has been expelled by his branch and the Association nine years ago. Since that time he has bombarded various officials in No7 Area and elsewhere with leaflets and letters protesting his innocence. Since that time, it has cost the RNA in legal fees something in the region of £15,000 to date,- so far to no avail. A consulting firm of solicitors has advised the cost of court action to prevent this person harrasing these people further would be in the region of £30,000 with no guarantee of success. The members of the National Council have been asked individually how the Council should act in this matter.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE NCM's REPORT

05/06 Several delegates questioned the need to appoint a commissioned officer to the post of General Secretary. One delegate feared that the new GS would be given the job from within as had happened several times before. Another asked when would the position be advertised and where?

The DNCM replying said he hoped that the person best qualified to do the job should be appointed.

The Chairman at this point intervened by saying the debate was being conducted in many parts of the room, He asked for one speaker at a time to address the meeting with his or her question to the DNCM.

AREA TOTE DRAW

06/08 The winners of the Area Tote Draw for the month of November was Nos.180. (**Wythenshawe**) No.195. (**Atherton**) and at this meeting No.69. (**Birkenhead**).

PRESIDENT'S APPEAL

07/08 The Presidents appeal realised £95.00 donated by the following branches.

ATHERTON	£5.00	LLANDUDNO	£ 5.00
CHESTER	£5.00	LLANGOLLEN	£5.00
CONGLETON	£5.00	NORTH MANCHESTER	£5.00
CROSBY	£5.00	RUNCORN	£10.00
DROYLSDEN	£10.00	SKIPTON	£5.00
HAZEL GROVE	£10.00	TRAFFORD	£5.00
LEYLAND	£5.00	WIGAN	£5.00
LIVERPOOL	£5.00	WREXHAM	£5.00

PROs REPORT

08/08 S/m Caulfield referred to Liverpool 'City of Culture' programme for this year. Unfortunately, he was still awaiting the event organisers to contact him. Despite his e-mails and their reassurances, he had heard nothing further from them. He would of course keep the Area informed should the situation change.

He was concerned that the RNA appeared to enjoy little, if any national coverage in the media. Nobody it would appear seems to know who we are. This fact has been highlighted by our Area President. This year in the Circular Letter to Branches, Branch Secretary's should have read that the RNA will be supporting a national appeal as our nominated charity 'Help for Heroes' The fund would help to provide a purpose built rehabilitation centre in Surrey for those servicemen wounded or injured in Afghanistan or Iraq. The initiative will receive extended coverage in *Navy News* hopefully, this may attract some national media coverage, S/m Caulfield asked the branches to consider holding an event in their meeting places to support this cause. A monthly update will be published giving the progress of the appeal. His own branch [Pendleton] will be hosting a charity night to support this cause.

National Council have been asked to consider the possibility of a 'National Flag' for the RNA. This would require a lot of organising, but will involve local authority permission in various areas and towns to collect money from the public. It would require a licence to do this.

However, S/m Caulfield pointed out if the Area was invited to say a private event such as a race meeting, permission to have a collection need only be required from the race course owners. Cartmel Racecourse have given permission for the RNA to be the designated charity at one of their future meetings.

S/m Caulfield concluding his report said his branch are hoping to introduce a motion to National Conference this year by proposing to increase the present £1,000 grant from the Central Charities Fund to Broughton House to £2,000. His branch would welcome seconder from a branch withing the Area to this motion.

The Chairman thanking the PRO for his report said his own branch [Crosby] would be hosting a Veterans day on June 22nd they were hoping to promote a 'Help for Heroes' also.

AREA WELFARE ADVISOR

09/08 S/m Thomas gave information on the various ways families of deceased shipmates could obtain help with expenses such as funeral costs etc, and which authorities to approach. He also added, that partners of the deceased were entitled to the same level of help. He did however, comment that not all Social Services approached the matter in the same way; it appears to be something of a post code lottery. This applied to such things as help in the home, by way of stair lifts, disabled access and home helps. "This is where", said S/m Thomas that the ex service agencies such as SSAFA RNBT and the RBL come into the picture via their case workers. The information given to these caseworkers is treated as confidential; and is not discussed by the caseworker only to his head office.

S/m Thomas then referred to the December National Council meeting where it was decided to donate £15,000 to the 'Help for Heroes' fund. In doing so, the National Council also made the recommendation that Areas and Branches make this their principal nominated charity for 2008. Details of this charity and its purpose can be found in the January Circular Letter to Branches.

Concluding his report, S/m Thomas mentioned a home in North Yorkshire called Lister House which has excellent facilities for injured ex service people.

AREA PRESIDENT

10/08 S/m Harley addressing the meeting, thanked the Atherton branch [our hosts today] for the excellent facilities provided for this meeting. He also thanked all those shipmates and branches who had sent "an avalanche" of Christmas cards to Joan and himself: incidentally, he did not receive one from Headquarters!

He was particularly glad to see the delegates looking so fit and well. He said this because according to some people in the RNA shipmates from this Area are currently suffering from a galloping case of misinformation. The National President speaks of misinformation circulating in Area 10. The General Secretary informed S/m Wilkie [Atherton] that his views are largely based on misrepresentation and the deputy President during several phone calls to me in December referred to problems caused by misinformation. The dictionary describes misinformation as incorrect information, and similar pronouncements.

"It is" said the President a very serious allegation for anybody to make to an individual, - let alone an entire Area. This misinformation noun had been repeated to him in conversation with the President and his deputy several times during telephone calls with them in the last month. Not one of them identified one solitary item of alleged untruths, fiction or invention during their conversations with me

AREA PRESIDENT(cont)

10/08 Further references were made, such as 'unsubstantiated hearsay' "that's your letters and my letters shipmates". And 'unfounded statements' "that one was directed at me" "It would appear" said S/m Harley that Chelsea Manor Street took exception to some of the things I said at the North Manchester conference in October last. He then cited his remarks that he made at that meeting; including the highlighting of the relocation Working Party's debacle caused mainly by our ignorance of the VAT issues involved, despite a query being raised in July about this issue. "How much" he asked, has been expended so far on this project "when we do not have the keys to a broom cupboard in Portsmouth: let alone any sign of a premises"

At the North Manchester meeting, he recalled the number of branches from this Area who had written to the hierarchy expressing their discontent at the leadership of the Association which were constantly reaching his ears. He spoke about the way annual conference in Torquay was mishandled by the President, and the confusion this had caused to the many delegates. A WRENS veteran from another Area stated "It was dreadful" "The Chairman should have resigned out of sheer embarrassment."

At the North Manchester meeting he had praised the efforts of the Royal British Legion to focus the nation's attention on the treatment of wounded ex-servicemen and their relatives. "What was the RNA doing? The National Council was nominating members to investigate an NCM who was supposed to have brought the Association into disrepute" when it was known this person had no case to answer.

The President then referred to an initiative emanating from Headquarters of supplying computers to all the RNA branches, "Does anybody remember that" said S/m Harley? One of our Branch Secretary's has taken the trouble to cost this venture out, including the purchase of the machines also the printers, installation fees and maintenance; let alone the training in many cases. The cost would have been horrendous. "Incidentally" said S/m Harley, "has any branch received one of these computers yet"? Has the Circular Letter to Branches mentioned this lately? "Where then shipmates are these unfounded statements?"

The President then mentioned his letter to Headquarters sent in September warning of the disquiet in the Area about poor leadership etc. This letter was not acknowledged. In October I repeated the exercise; again, shipmates no response. "No misinformation there shipmates" He recalled a statement made by a delegate at the North Manchester conference who said 'the only people who know about the RNA's existence are the people who are in it'

The President asked the meeting to recall the contents of S/m Wilkie's letter to the General Secretary. It was polite, and it was probing. It sought answers to many questions: unfortunately, he did not get them. What he received in reply was a disgraceful response from the General Secretary. It was rude and insulting. Because of its content he, [S/m Harley] had sent copies of it to the President, deputy President and National Chairman by recorded delivery. Also, a copy of the GS letter was sent to each Area NCM. The December meeting of the National Council dealt with our complaint against the General Secretary "after a fashion" the GS said at that meeting he stood by every word in his letter to S/m Wilkie and he had no intention of apologising, and if he was made to apologise he would resign. "Well shipmates" said S/m Harley "he has apologised, and he still has a job." He ended with his punchline that he had a desk full of letters of complaints and he had no intention of responding to them". Having made that statement both the National President and its Chairman remained silent. A motion of Confidence in the General Secretary was proposed at that meeting by the National Chairman but inexplicably was not voted upon. "Many of you here today, will know from your own branch meetings if you

have a motion that has been seconded: it must be debated and voted on or withdrawn ; in other words it must have a destiny". In the case of the National Council meeting, they did nothing: they just moved on to other business.

The President then turned to the proceedings of National conference. The minutes of that conference should be similar to Hansard he said. "Unfortunately, they are not. A remark made at that conference by the President to an NCM did not appear in those minutes and has been denied by the President; although, many delegates who attended at Torquay said the remark was made.

Concluding, S/m Harley wondered in which way the Association was heading under the current leadership. It was his view, that the Association President and Chairman should seriously consider their positions in respect of their recent actions. Our members should be entitled to their leadership and protection, and he did not believe we have got it.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

.11/08 S/m Donnelly (North Manchester) speaking as an Associate member, he remarked on the present plight of the RNA "If any organisation needed an overhaul from top to bottom, it is this organisation. It is the most feudalistic system he had come across". It should exist to look after its membership; in the two years he had been a member, he had yet to see any directive issued from Headquarters stating this is what we do and this is what we are fighting for, and hope to achieve.

11/08 S/m Donnelly went on to say the membership as a whole must insist on a say in the appointment of the new General Secretary. A short list should be drawn up and the candidates profile should be made available he said. Branches should decide by vote, which candidate should be chosen. That is the only right and proper way to conduct this exercise and you as members must insist on it.

"Whilst Headquarters carry a lot of blame for this state of affairs, you as members of the RNA must also accept some of the blame. Because you have allowed these people to 'shangie' your Association." "You have" said S/m Donnelly an elected Area representative in your NCM. "I have yet to see any instruction coming from the delegates at these Area conferences telling our NCM these are the issues we want you to raise in National Council, and what they,[NC] intend doing about it"

"It is time the individual members of this Association made a stand. The RNA cannot flourish without the active involvement of its members, If you are not prepared to make a stand, you will march this Association into oblivion."

12/08 S/m Kelly (Hazel Grove) After giving information about the annual parade and service to commemorate the loss of the convoy rescue vessel *SS Stockport*; to be hosted by his branch on February 24th, he raised the question concerning the recent practice of the local police who now require written information in the form of questionnaires about the proposed parade. In addition, they require a risk assessment in case of accident to the members of the public due to the parade. Not only did he have to satisfy the police with the questionnaire, he was also required to attend the local town hall to discuss the parade arrangements, despite the fact this parade has been conducted by his branch for many years without any problems. It was his opinion that it was becoming more and more difficult to organise events such as this.

13/08 S/m Wood (North Manchester) referred to his letter quoted in the Correspondence

earlier. He stood by his remarks made in that letter. "We have an elected Area committee, they should be instructing our NCM what to do and say at National Council meetings". "When the unelected members of Council attempt to control these meetings he should stand up and say he is not prepared for them to take charge of the meeting. And if they do not leave he should withdraw calling on the other NCM's to follow him.

14/08 A member of the Congleton branch proposed a vote of confidence in the Area committee. This was carried unanimously.

15/08 The Chairman asked the delegates to consider the outcome of the letter sent by the Area committee to all branches earlier in the month requesting they withhold their subscriptions to Headquarters; pending the outcome of this conference. S/m Tollerton continuing, said, in view of the fact that S/m Wilkie [Atherton] had received an apology—albiet a grudging one, would it be in our interests to continue this action?

S/m Wilkie addressing the meeting added if the action continued, many branches could find themselves deprived of attending conference in Dundee this year. Many had already booked accommodation. Although he advised we should lift the ban, he reminded the delegates of the General Secretary's remarks that 'He had a deskful of letters he had no intention of answering' He should be pursued by the writers of these for a reply.

The President concurring, said it was the job of the GS to answer all correspondence from the branches, that is what he is paid to do: at a very generous salary.

S/m Gaskell (Rochdale) suggested that a motion could be introduced at national conference proposing that letters sent to Headquarters should be responded to within 21 days.

16/08 It was overwhelmingly agreed by a card vote to lift the withholding of Headquarters subscriptions.

17/08 **VENUE FOR THE SPRING AREA CONFERENCE (April 26th 2008)**

The Chairman reminded the delegates that the venue for the spring Area conference and Reunion would be held at the Britannia Savoy Hotel Blackpool during the weekend of April 25th – 28th (inclusive). All 200 places are now fully booked, and the weekend entertainment has been arranged.

Before closing the meeting, the Chairman said he wished to thank the Vice Chairman, Mrs Barbara Jones. She assumed the position of Chairman at very short notice: a position she held for six months following the sudden death of the former Chairman S/m John Dixon.

The meeting concluded at 1430.

BRANCH AND MISCELLANEOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Area Address List** Changes have taken place at the following;
- Area Chairman:** S/m David Tollerton (Crosby) [elected 26. 01. 2008]
2 Hornby Road Bootle LIVERPOOL L20 8BJ
Tele: 0151 933 4992
- Ellesmere Port** This branch has now decommissioned w.e.f. 31.12. 2007
- Rochdale Branch** The Branch now meet at the Spread Eagle P.H.
Cheetham Street Rochdale
Meeting frequency unchanged [3rd Monday]
- Runcorn Branch** Club closed. Branch now meets at the Royal British Legion club Halton.
Frequency: 2nd Friday of each month.
- Wallasey Branch** Secretary's Post code should read **CH44 9EN**
[incorrect in RNA Diary]

No.10 Area Website Don't forget to visit your Area website; www.rna-10-area.co.uk for the latest news of the Area and national news. Keep up to date via the links pages with other areas, branches and ship associations etc.

Visiting Ships Following a revision in security procedures, information regarding ships visits will be distributed to persons only on 'a need to know' basis and to those directly involved with the visit arrangements. Notice of future visits will now only be announced one month in advance to those persons involved.

Vanguard Magazine The closing date for articles and letters etc for the Autumn 2008 issue of the magazine is **August 23rd 2008**

Area Reunion The Area Reunion and spring conference weekend will take place at the Britannia Savoy Hotel Queens Promenade Blackpool FY2 9SJ from Friday April 25th until Monday April 28th 2008. Cost for the weekend is £99 per person.