

The **2008 Reunion of 216 Para Sig Sqn** was held at the **Ardsley House Hotel, Barnsley**, on Friday and Sat 2/3 May. Friday night saw the DZ taken and held so the 'Old Guard' could meet and greet over a few beers. On Saturday morning there was a Golf Tournament for the sporting elite, while the rest went shopping or sight-seeing. In the evening, 155 veterans, wives, and partners gathered to wine, dine, and dance the night away.

At the start of the festivities, the Sqn Standard was marched in by our Branch Standard Bearer **Dave Fox** and set in place of honour on the stage. We were then served a superb 3-course meal and much liquid refreshment. When everyone was quite replete, **Brig John Griffin** addressed a very relaxed OCA. He welcomed everyone, especially those who had journeyed from as far afield as Singapore (**Hugh Smith**), Cyprus (**John O'Rourke**), Spain (**Billy Irwin** and **Myrtle Marshall**), Malta (**Pete Pritchard**) and South Africa (**Bob Paterson**). **Brig John** then gave a news update of the current 216 Para Sqn, serving in Afghanistan. He also reminded us of the Airborne Signals Reunion at Caythorpe on 6/7 September. During the speech we rose to toast "Absent Friends", in particular the recently departed **Steve Marshall**, **Robbie Laing** and **Matt McBirney**. The final, resounding toast was as always, "The Squadron."

After that, **Jimmy Campbell** gave his usual light-hearted debrief on the day's Golf Tournament, which in a close competition, was won by **Robin Stanley**, who collected the Steve Marshall Memorial Trophy – in memory of one who did so much to revive the reunions. **Bob Mills** finished a very close second, while our Best Lady Golfer was once again, **Linda MacDonald**. **Geordie Wilson** received a remotely controlled golf ball, which claims to be impossible to lose – doubtless **Geordie** will disprove the manufacturer's claim! **Hugh Smith** won the "Longest Drive" – Singapore to Barnsley in a Vauxhall Vectra! The prizes were presented by **Myrtle Marshall**.

Next, **Jim Flockhart** stepped up to speak briefly about "Sqn Legends" who have gone before us to the "Final DZ." How we must continue to revere their memory. He caused no little embarrassment to a certain 'hack' by calling him forward to receive a bronze statuette of a 'Signaller with SLR' for "...helping preserve the legends." Thanks **Jim**.

This was followed by an artistic solo performance by **Billy Irwin** on musical spoons, delivered with typical 'Noddy' enthusiasm. Wee '**Mac**' **MacDonald** says he has entered **Billy** for the next X-Factor.

Before the dance proper there was a Raffle and a Dutch auction of (mostly) airborne memorabilia. This was MCd by **Ray Duffy** in inimitable style. **Geordie Wilson's** raffle prize was a silver Pegasus statuette; he was (nearly) speechless with delight! **Peter Whitehead** won a Golf Trolley, which was later seen sporting a cloud of coloured balloons and a puncture! **Ray**, by his efforts and the generosity of the audience, managed to raise a good sum for OCA funds. He also sold £100 worth of 216 lapel badges during the weekend. Well done, **Ray**.

The disco which followed had most of us dancing (?) into the wee small hours. Later, as we tottered off to bed, thinking of the fast-approaching breakfast, we agreed that the venue was just right; the food and drink superb; the staff friendly and efficient and the music just the ticket for our advanced years. Thanks for that input, **Paul Richardson**.

During and after a painfully noisy breakfast, everyone voiced approval of a marvellous reunion. There was a unanimous vote of thanks to the OCA Committee of **Ralph Porter** (Chief Organiser), **Ray Duffy** (Secretary), **John Aspinall** (Treasurer), **Craig Treeby** (RBL Branch Chairman), **Keith Weller** (Sqn Website), and **Alan Hogg** (OCA Data Base Design). Their various labours brought the OCA much pleasure, and are greatly appreciated by us all.

We also wish to thank the Hotel Manager, **Ann Kelly**, Event Co-ordinators **Julie Slater** and **Dawn Kelly** and all the Staff at the **Best Western Ardsley House Hotel** for a very friendly and highly professional service. By the way, according to our local contact, **John 'Chalky' White** – bar takings for Friday and Saturday nights exceeded all known records for the Hotel!

We departed mid-morning Sunday, slightly jaded, but in good heart. Exhaustively re-united, but nonetheless keen to return for another event in 2010 which we greatly anticipate.