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 **ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association**
The charity that supports the RAF family

July-September 2020

1940

Battle Of Britain

2020



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Welcome

When we planned this issue of Air Mail 12 months ago, we were thinking of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the proud tradition of how our RAF protects our nation endures today.

Since early spring this year, the UK and world media have drawn many comparisons between those days and nights in late 1940 and our fight against COVID-19. A battle we have faced as a nation and as the whole of humanity. A complete change to our daily lives. Moments of great hardship and loss. Community spirit that has strengthened and deepened. Moments of boredom and frustration. Individual and collective acts of heroism, kindness, innovation and ingenuity to help us all keep calm and carry on.

I hope we have managed to reflect some of this in our pages – from the exploits of the Royal Air Force in 1940 to the defence and humanitarian action of the RAF today and, of course, the work of the Association this year to support everyone in the RAF community.

My thanks go to everyone involved in the production of this magazine and its sister publication, Talking Air Mail. Your adaptability, stoicism, and sheer grit means there is another edition to inform and entertain members – and keep spirits up. From our makeshift office sheds, our dining room tables and our socially distanced workplaces, we are proud to have brought this to you. We hope you enjoy the read.



Annie

Annie O'Brian
Editor

AIR MAIL MAGAZINE
Contact, comment, connect.

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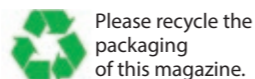
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7-17 NEWS

All the latest from the Association and the RAF family, including: the Association's response to COVID-19; support for dementia carers; National Presidential Certificate winners; an update on membership fees; RAFA Rides goes virtual; an appeal from RAF College Cranwell; and a new member of The Few.

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Dear Air Mail...

... your letters and emails



Unusual incidents

In summer 1971, our Nimrod's windscreens became obscured by thunderbugs while flying off the south coast. Though the wipers and spray cleared them, soon no water remained, and both windscreens became an impenetrable mess. "Washer bottle's run out, Eng," my skipper intoned. "No," came the reply, "there's plenty of water left. The float's only halfway down." Unable to see, we set off for nearby RAF St Mawgan. While preparing for landing with zero forward visibility the engineer came back on the intercom: "Sorry pilots, my mistake. The reservoir is empty – there was a dirty mark on the sight glass!" A top-up with water and washing up liquid was – thankfully – followed by an uneventful landing. COLIN POMEROY



In 1967-8 I was posted to RAF Gan when the carrier HMS Ark Royal was on exercise nearby. Its aircraft would often use Gan's runway, which ran the length of the island. One day, a Sea Vixen landed and dropped its tailhook, which was odd as Gan had no wire to catch the hook and slow the aircraft. Everybody waited for a roar of the engine and take-off once the pilot realised his error. As can be seen by the photo, this realisation came too late. The result was one pilot with wet feet being rescued from his aircraft. STUART POWELL

While on attachment aboard HMS Pembroke we participated in a NATO exercise where my task was to decode incoming signals. During the early hours of the morning, and due to what I can only assume was tiredness, I decoded a signal of the position of one of our ships which, when plotted, showed it to be boldly sailing across Dartmoor! Needless to say I was hauled up in front of the Wing Commander the next day, who read me my fortune! CHARLES LOVE

In the early hours of 31 August 1967, I was on guard duty at RAF Khormaksar when I saw a rotation of red and green lights in the sky. After 3-4 minutes they disappeared. When the coach arrived at end of my shift I was asked by the Chief Technician why I had a loaded rifle. I replied that I had seen a UFO, whereupon there were shouts from the coach of "charge him, Chief!" and "drunk on duty!" A few years later I was on a train to London when the same Chief Technician (now a Flight Sergeant) got on and spotted me. "You're the lad who that saw the UFO in Aden, aren't you?" he said. In 1973 I was posted to Germany where the Flight Sergeant (now a Warrant Officer) spotted me again. "You're the lad who saw the UFO aren't you?" I was, and still am, 'the lad who saw the UFO'. GEORGE MUNDAY

Famous faces

While stationed at RAF El Adem, HRH Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh arrived en-route to their tour of the Commonwealth. I was chosen to present the princess with a bouquet of flowers and was very nervous. I had to approach the princess, salute, say "Your Royal Highness, on behalf of the men of RAF El Adem," then give her the flowers. The next day I was in trouble with the Commanding Officer. The princess had apparently offered her hand and I hadn't shaken it. I saw no hand! Mind you, it was a large bouquet. JOHN ANDERSON

Photographic intelligence

[RE last issue's article on RAF Medmenham]. In 1955 I was posted to RAF Episkopi in Cyprus as a Tracer PI, working initially on the EOKA emergency then on the Suez campaign. The photographs in your article reminded me of certain aspects of this work, particularly the use of stereoscopes, the plotting of runs, and the use of maps; of which JARIC had a good collection – some dating back a while! ROGER E BARRETT

I joined the RAF in 1956 and was sent to RAF Nuneham Park for training as Tracer PI. After various postings, including a six-month stint at RAF Medmenham, I went to RAF Episkopi in Cyprus. Here I spent two-and-a-half wonderful years, despite the EOKA Terrorist emergency. Most of the photographs we worked with were taken over Yemen and Oman, tracking potential Russian infiltration. Plotting photos of endless miles of desert and ever-changing dunes and wadis was a challenge; and the stereoscope certainly proved its worth in identifying obscure geographical features. JOHN GRIFFITHS



©Medmenham Association

In and out

I joined the RAF in September 1948, and received the King's Shilling in Number 1 Block RAF Locking. While my career took me to Iraq, Hong Kong, Australia, the UAE and Malaysia, my last role with the RAF, in 1975, was as Course Designer and Course Supervisor in Electronic Engineering. This was based at – you guessed it – Number 1 Tech Block RAF Locking. You can imagine my surprise when I was told that the Station Commander wanted to see me, as it had never been known for someone to leave the RAF from exactly the same spot as they had joined. Of course, his first words to me were: "where have you been hiding all this time!?" GORDON FOWLER

Musical memories

In the mid-1960s I was stationed at RAF Khormaksar when an Argosy aircraft of 105 Squadron was carrying out asymmetric landing and take-off. One attempt, however, resulted in the aircraft ending up in the water at the runway's end. All escaped unharmed, but BFBS were running their 'Wireless for the Blind' event at the time, and for a donation a record would be played. Needless to say, another squadron soon had "Gone Fishing" on the radio! DAVID SULLY

To comment in or contribute to Air Mail, please email airmail@rafa.org.uk. Alternatively, write to Annie O'Brian, Editor, Air Mail, RAF Association, Atlas House, Wembley Road, Leicester, LE1 3UT. Your correspondence should be clearly marked FOR PUBLICATION. The editor's decision on inclusion is final, and longer letters may be abridged due to limited space. Only submissions made by email will be acknowledged before publication.

Jim Auton MBE

[RE the passing of Jim Auton MBE]. While College Chaplain at RAF Cranwell, it was my privilege to join Jim at the annual Newark memorial service for the 1944 Warsaw Airlift. These occasions were inspirational, not least for the Cranwell cadets, who were able to meet Jim and members of the Polish Secret Army of the Interior and learn of their exceptional courage. While the attrition rate during the Warsaw Air Bridge was high, it was nonetheless 'a debt of honour', as Churchill said. This timeless principle, and the sacrifices involved, have helped to cement the strong bonds of friendship between our two nations. JONATHAN CHAFFEY

Virtual bakers

I just wanted to say what fun we had making the traditional cherry cake (p.58 of January's issue). In these unprecedented times of being stuck indoors, we decided to share the recipe with our 15-year-old granddaughter over Skype. We simultaneously followed the recipe and the results were brilliant. It kept us occupied for a few hours – baking. Keep up the brilliant work you do for us all. JOHN C BILLINGS MBE



©Heidi Burton

I am exceptionally proud of the Association's response to the COVID-19 crisis and I wish to convey my sincere and grateful thanks to everyone who has played a part in this work. What you have done in the UK, and across the world, during this worrying and uniquely testing time is unprecedented.

I am acutely conscious that many of our RAF family have been, and still are, vulnerable. In March, the Association set up a new telephone outreach service to contact more than 30,000 high-risk category members of our community. We have spoken to many people who are experiencing extreme loneliness or running out of food. Predictably, RAFA delivered immediate assistance to them through Operation CONNECT. This Operation provides four new projects: a service to deliver bag drops of essential food, toiletries etc; a daily entertainment programme; a friendship telephone helpline; and a regular telephone befriending service. These projects were launched so that we could make a difference: and we have! Some of the responses we have had from grateful beneficiaries are printed later in this magazine.

My specific thanks go to: our existing and new volunteers; the serving personnel who have stepped up to the plate; the branches that have reached out to every one of their vulnerable members; the members who have called in to see how they can help; and our

employees across the Association. Every single one of you has rolled up your sleeves and made our response work, in the shortest time possible and to the greatest effect. I am humbled by your selfless commitment to help those in need.

Across all our welfare services we are seeing an increasing level of demand for support. Consequently, we have launched an emergency COVID-19 fundraising appeal to ensure that we are able to continue to satisfy this need while so many normal fundraising avenues are closed to us.

As well as requiring us to cancel our own Annual and Area conferences, sadly, the measures that we are living through this year have prevented us from fully commemorating and celebrating many anniversaries. The national VE Day 75th anniversary was more muted than planned, while the forthcoming VJ Day 75th and Battle of Britain 80th anniversary commemorations will be different. However, we will mark these anniversaries personally, corporately and with gratitude; similarly we will overtly record our thanks to everyone who has stepped up to see us through the COVID-19 crisis.

Stay safe, stay well and, most importantly, stay at home for as long as your government requests. Please ask for our help whenever you need it: 0800 018 2361.

Thank you most sincerely.

"I am exceptionally proud of the Association's response"



**Air Marshal Sir Baz North
President**



©Phil Greig

RAFA to the core

Two National Presidential Certificates awarded in June.

Ali Gibson: for services to the Association and the excellent support of Harrow Branch and Club, and Aylesbury and Halton Branch.

For more than 20 years Ali (Alison) Gibson has worked tirelessly and enthusiastically, delivering welfare support, fundraising, recruiting new members and supporting Area Conferences. An Honorary Welfare Officer at the Harrow and District Branch for the last six years, she has worked closely with the partners of station executives at RAF Northolt to visit and support elderly veterans in need; and enabled the station RAFALOs to then continue her outstanding support work. She visits many other veterans, particularly in the Abbeyfields Care Home in Aylesbury.

At the monthly Aylesbury and Halton Branch Veterans' Lunches she plans and prepares "a plethora of desserts", hosts veterans and encourages serving personnel to share their stories of today's RAF with retired personnel.

Ali's "effervescent drive and determination to help support the whole RAF family" helped her provide four years of specialist expertise to maintain the gardens of RAF Halton's two contact houses, allowing RAF families to enjoy much-valued, private outside space. She has also run the Association's refreshment and recruitment stands for three years at RAF Halton's Families' Day and at the last two RAF Air Cadet Inter Squadron Competitions at the station.

Her support to South East and Eastern Area Conferences has been unstinting. "She just gets on with it, without any fuss," says Area Divisional Manager, Ailsa Gough. Ali has also supported London fundraising collections for the last two years, helping branch members, RAF collectors and assisting with the area team count. She also supports the Abbots and Kings Langley Branch bi-annual Wings Appeal collections.



Pat and Trevor Hayes: for dedication to veterans' welfare and fundraising for the Abbots and Kings Langley RAFA Branch and surrounding communities.

Pat and Trevor Hayes display "unstinting commitment and leadership and are exceptionally professional in all they do." They work tirelessly throughout the year and continuously put the needs of others before their own.

Since 2010 they have raised more than £70,000. For more than 15 years they have planned and executed the annual Battle of Britain parade and service in Hemel Hempstead. Working with the local authorities, they ensure both go off without a hitch. Several local RAF Air Cadet squadrons, veteran and other youth groups take part and are always led by a band, something the Hayes always manage to arrange - even though bands are getting fewer and further between. Pat and Trevor also play an active part in the planning and execution of the Hemel Hempstead Remembrance Day service and parade.

During the year they arrange visits to museums, an annual garden party, fish and chips lunches and other branch activities to give members the chance to stay in contact.

Pat Hayes is a very active Honorary Welfare Officer in Watford and Hemel Hempstead and the surrounding area, and many veterans and their families benefit from her diligence.

Their nomination said: "They are a very caring and active couple, at the centre of their community and branch and are RAFA to the core. Undoubtedly, without them the Abbots and Kings Langley Branch would cease to exist, and many veterans and beneficiaries currently, and in the future, would suffer".



Op CONNECT: the Association's emergency response to COVID-19

Within days of the lockdown being implemented in the UK, the Association revolutionised its services to meet the needs of the RAF community.



One of the hundreds of happy recipients of a bag drop © RAF Association

“When face-to-face contact - the essence of our support for the RAF community - was suddenly no longer possible, we immediately implemented plans which allowed us to continue the majority of our normal welfare operations.” said Nick Bunting, Secretary General of the RAF Association.

“But we knew this wouldn't be enough; we needed to do more to support those who would be most affected by lockdown. We launched Operation CONNECT and, very soon, we found some truly desperate levels of need,” said Nick Bunting, Secretary General of the Association.

Operation CONNECT is using the combined forces of our branches, employees, and existing and new volunteers on four large-scale projects addressing the issues which members of our RAF community have been facing.

Project OUTREACH is a telephone outreach service, contacting more than 30,000 people who are in higher risk groups and have therefore been self-isolating or shielding. The service is checking on their welfare, alerting them to the support services in place and offering them ongoing telephone friendship from a regular volunteer. More than 270 branches and 260 volunteers (including employees from ICAP and Raytheon) have been making welfare check calls. At the time of going to print they are also supporting more than 1,000 individuals with weekly telephone befriending calls.

Project HELPLINE is a friendship helpline (0800 018 2361) that anyone in the RAF community can call if they are feeling isolated or lonely and want a friendly chat with someone who understands.

“The Association made sure we would not starve. Thank you.”

“When I called, Mrs M had had a fall; the ambulance crew were with her. They advised no major concerns, but she asked me to phone her again later to check that her symptoms had not changed or worsened.”

Project ENTERTAIN is a RAF-themed daily entertainment programme broadcast over the internet, which is brightening the days of people stuck at home during lockdown. There have been more than 700,000 views of the 100 sessions which have taken place so far. These have included low-impact fitness, tap dancing lessons and a host of live concerts and sing-alongs that have kept viewers active and entertained. Talks on history and life in the RAF have included a huge variety of guest speakers, such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the RAF's Deputy Commander Operations (Air Marshal Gerry Mayhew), the Red

Arrows' first female pilot (Kirsty Murphy) and Gulf War prisoner of war, John Peters. Past and live sessions can be viewed at:

[bit.ly/Proj ENTERTAIN](http://bit.ly/Proj_ENTERTAIN).

Project BAG DROP is delivering emergency provisions to the doorsteps of vulnerable members of our RAF community who are running out of food and other essential supplies. Every request for support is assessed and the bags contain enough for people to get by until we help them to find alternative solutions. So far, this service has dealt with more than 300 cases.

One couple in their eighties had health conditions that made it too dangerous for them to go out for provisions. Ken Topaz, a former air electronics officer left the RAF on medical grounds in 1973 after being the sole survivor of a crash landing. His wife, Shirley, had just come out of hospital when the government lockdown started.

Shirley said: “We decided to stay put because we didn't want to take any chances with our health. Unfortunately, after a fortnight we ran out of food and other essentials.”

With family and friends too far away or unable to leave their own homes to provide help, the couple sent out a plea to the RAF Association. Ken said: “We couldn't believe how quickly [they] arrived. We don't normally ask for charity help, but we had no other choice, given the circumstances. We're very grateful.”

After COVID-19 – the future

The Association has established a working group to examine how COVID-19 will have an impact on our future operations. We are adopting an ambitious and positive approach to the challenges ahead, recognising that important decisions are needed to ensure that the Association continues to meet the changing welfare needs of our RAF community.

Reporting to Council, the working group comprises the President, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council, the Chairs of the

“Really impressed with the befriending service. The befriender my father has couldn't be nicer. He's so joyful when he's had communication with him, it's a weight off our shoulders knowing that there's someone else who cares about him.”

“It is acts of kindness like the gift received today from RAFA that restores one's faith in the greater good, and serves as a reminder that we are indeed a part of an unwavering common bond. We are Air Force. We are family.”

Employees were redeployed alongside volunteers to get essentials to those who needed them most. © RAF Association



Urgent Appeal

Normal fundraising, events and collections have stopped due to COVID-19 and the Association faces a forecasted £10million impact on its finances as a result. We have launched an emergency fundraising appeal to ensure the increasing levels of demand can continue to be met. **Information and donations at rafa.org.uk/get-involved/emergency-covid19-appeal**. Make cheques out to Royal Air Forces Association and post to Finance Dept, Atlas House, Wembley Road, Leicester, LE3 1UT. (Write Op Connect on the back).

Our immense gratitude goes to the generous supporters who have already helped the emergency appeal grow to more than £500,000. Donations have come in from individuals, trusts and corporate partners, as well as many branches. Branches which had donated to the appeal by the time this issue of Air Mail went to print are:

1066	£1,687	Exmouth	£100	Northampton and District	£5,400
Abbots & Kings Langley	£6,950	Falmouth	£100	North Weald and Ongar	£7,000
Alresford and District	£928	Formby	£5,000	Plymouth	£1,500
Aylesbury and Halton	£5,000	Fleet	£5,000	Poole	£1,000
Banbury	£1,500	Fareham	£2,300	RAF St Mawgan	£4,000
Barrow-In-Furness	£1,000	Glasgow	£33,000	Rugby	£250
Barry	£500	Gloucester	£50	Sale/Wythenshawe	£30,000
Bedford	£650	Grimbsby and Cleethorpes	£2,000	Scarborough	£2,500
Blackhall	£2,500	Halifax	£3,050	Shrewsbury	£1,000
Bognor Regis	£13,000	Harrogate and District	£13,200	Stevenage	£3,000
Boston	£200	Hartlepool	£5,000	Stowmarket	£5,000
Cannock Chase	£250	High Wycombe	£50,000	Switzerland	£1,000
Carlisle Branch	£1,000	Huyton with Roby and Liverpool	£10,000	Thetford	£2,500
Carterton and Brize	£1,300	Isle of Man	£11,000	Thurrock	£5,000
Cheltenham	£15,000	Jersey	£30,000	Truro	£100
Chingford	£5,894	Kettering	£2,500	Wantage	£5,000
City of Bristol	£6,000	Keyworth	£1,000	Whitley Bay	£500
Cockermouth	£2,400	Leuchars	£1,000	Wimborne	£3,500
Dudley	£8,000	Littlehampton	£1,000	Witham and Rivenhall	£5,000
Dunstable	£3,000	Llanidloes	£200	Wolverhampton	£550
Eastbourne	£500	Llangollen	£350	WRAF	£2,000
Edinburgh	£6,000	Mid-Somerset	£500	York Branch	£5,000

"It's not been an easy few months"

Branches have played a vital role in supporting the welfare of their more vulnerable members during the COVID-19 outbreak – telephoning, supporting and caring. But members of one branch, Caduceus (medical services), have been a critical part of the response for the general public.



©James Humphreys



©Jan Mennie

Jan Mennie

Jan was an RAF Medical Assistant from 1998-2010 and trained as a paramedic in 2007. She is now a rapid response community paramedic attending end of life patients for pain relief, wound care, diabetic medication and more. "My role includes attending patients with COVID-19. We ask carers and family to help with simple dressings where

possible so that we protect the patients by limiting the amount of people going to their homes and we wear masks or visors along with aprons and gloves. People still need seeing."

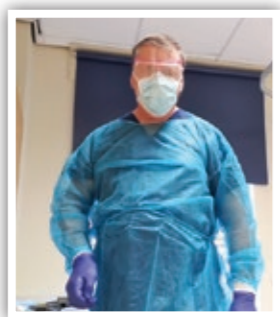
Andy Ormston

Andy was a RAF Medical Assistant and RAF Medical Administrator from 1985 to 1996, and trained as a nurse after leaving. He is now an Advanced Paramedic Prescriber in a GP surgery. The day used to consist of running face-to-face consultations, doing home visits and some telephone appointments.

"The way of working changed overnight. Now my day starts with a clinic list of telephone and video consultations."

Andy also works at the Hot Covid Clinics doing face-to-face assessments of patients who have suspected COVID-19.

"This pandemic has changed the way of work for many and for us has really proved the benefits of remote consultations rather than every patient having to come to us."



©Andy Ormston



©Maxime Owen

Maxime Owen

Maxime was a nurse with the RAF from 1969 to 1977 with the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service and has retired. "I continue to contribute to supporting my nursing colleagues by making scrubs at home for use in our local hospital: there is

more than one way veteran medical personnel are contributing to the fight against COVID-19."



©Steve Kilbey

Air Commodore Steve Kilbey (Caduceus Branch President)

Steve served as a Medical Officer with the RAF between 1990 and 2019, doing his final tour as Head of RAF Medical Services.

"I am a member of the Executive Committee of the Faculty of Conflict and Catastrophe Medicine; most recently lecturing at the United Nations Training School Ireland on the Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Course. By the mid-March, I was working as an emergency medical planner to help turn Ireland's influenza pandemic plan into a COVID-19 pandemic plan. In April I was helping a local network of local GPs plan their response and set up COVID-19 clinics, home visiting services and personal protective equipment (PPE).

James Ackroyd-Smith

James is an ambulance service paramedic, in the process of joining 4626 (County of Wiltshire) Squadron Royal Auxilliary Air Force.

"It's not been an easy few months. Daily call volumes reached the highest they have ever been. Many colleagues have had to take time off work to recover from the virus. Some have sadly died, and we keep these staff in our thoughts, always.

"Members of the armed forces, fire fighters and volunteers have been invaluable in this fight. Ambulance staff pride themselves on their support for patients and families through traumatic experiences. However, trying to show empathy and care through a visor, surgical mask and gown has been quite the challenge."



©James Ackroyd-Smith

Robert Morris

Robert left the RAF in 2019 after more than 25 years' service as a Mental Health Nurse. He is now at HMP Oakwood, the largest prison in the UK, with more than 2,000 prisoners.

"On a normal day work is very similar to that in the RAF. It starts with a morning meeting to review the previous day's assessments then individual sessions and admin. Since the start of lockdown all routine individual therapy with contact has been restricted to essential only. There is now allocated telephone time and an increased use of self-help literature. I make an effort to write regularly to everyone on my caseload. But team morale couldn't be better, helped by our regular doses of cake and chocolate."



©Rob Morris

RAF battles COVID-19 for the nation

Thousands of British troops, including many from the Royal Air Force, have been supporting the NHS in the battle against COVID-19. RAF transport aircraft and helicopters have been moving critically ill patients and vital medical equipment around the UK and the world, while RAF personnel have been driving ambulances and helping to test a NHS smartphone app that could help prevent the spread of the virus.

Two military helicopter 'hubs' were established to meet requests for assistance from the NHS. Three RAF Pumas were moved to Kinloss Barracks in Scotland, supported by an RAF Chinook and an Army Wildcat operating out of RAF Leeming in Yorkshire. Early in the crisis, an RAF Atlas evacuated a critically ill patient from the Shetland Islands to Aberdeen hospital. One of the Pumas transferred another patient from the Isle of Arran to a hospital in Kilmarnock.

The Puma detachment commander, Squadron Leader Johnny Longland, said: "Just over three hours after the crew received the call, the patient had travelled 162 nautical miles and was in the Intensive Care Unit. The training that we conducted with the emergency medical teams across Scotland ensured that, when the time came, we were all ready for a quick and smooth transfer of a patient."

The second helicopter hub covering the Midlands and Southern England was established at RAF Benson in Oxfordshire and drew on RAF, Army and Royal Navy assets. The task was to support medical transports and move equipment and personnel as required. An RAF Atlas was used to airlift a load of personal protection equipment from Turkey.

The RAF has been at the forefront of testing a NHS contact-tracing smartphone app. Personnel at RAF Leeming were involved in trialling the software, led by the station's innovative digital unit, RAF eXperimental (RAFEX), who have been working closely with NHSX and partners. More than 300 personnel and their families at Leeming carried the app on their phones as 'beta testers'. The NHS chose the base to host the trial because



RAFEX has a record of testing apps and is at the forefront of driving new processes across the force.

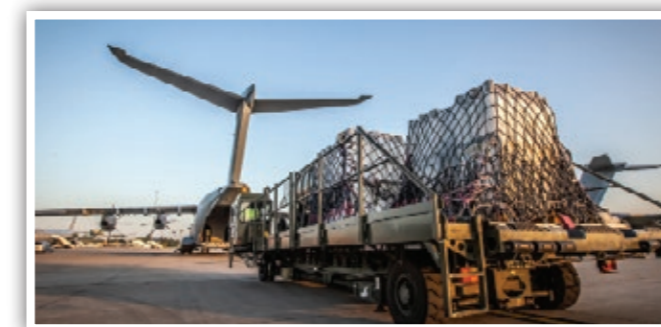
RAF personnel have been involved in the fight against the virus by staffing civilian ambulances. Teams at Honington and Marham were among those who took delivery of emergency vehicles to help the East

of England Ambulance Service with the surge in virus-related calls. The volunteers from various RAF trades undertook some intensive clinical training to improve their skills before reporting for duty.

More than 300 RAF nurses have been working alongside NHS teams across the country. For example, 30 medics from the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service have been helping on the front line at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford.

RAF Odiham's Chinook Support Centre has been supporting the NHS by manufacturing and distributing supportive clips to NHS workers to ease discomfort caused by the protective face masks. The joint RAF and Boeing team quickly identified a request from the 3-D National Printing Society, supported by Government direction, to manufacture supportive clips to adapt the elasticated straps on protective face masks that were causing pain and discomfort during prolonged periods of use.

by Mike Curtis



Top: Puma Helicopter force training over the Western Hebrides before later evacuating a COVID-19 patient from Shetland to Aberdeen Hospital. Three aircraft have been deployed at Kinloss Barracks to support MACA (Military Aid to Civilian Authorities). Above right: RAF Leeming is at the forefront of testing a NHS smartphone app to try to stop the spread of COVID-19. Above left: As part of the Aviation Task Force Covid Support Force, a Chinook helicopter from RAF Odiham was deployed in support of the NHS assurance of Harrogate, Bristol and Sunderland Nightingale Hospitals. Bottom left: The UK Armed Forces have delivered essential equipment to the Falkland Islands to enable the construction of an oxygen generation plant to increase the supply of oxygen to King Edward Memorial Hospital. A Royal Air Force C-17 Globemaster delivered the equipment to British Forces South Atlantic Islands as part of the UK Government's support to the Overseas Territories during the coronavirus pandemic. All images © MOD/Crown 2020.

Membership fees

Association membership subscriptions are reviewed every two years and fees effective from 2021 onwards have now been set by Council. The Retail Price Index for the period December 2017 to December 2019 was used as the basis for calculations and a 6.9% increase approved. Details of the new subscription rates, which will come into effect for joining or renewing members from 1 January 2021, are in the table to the right.

Announcing the change, Del Rowlands, Director of Membership, said: "Being part of our Association has never been more important. As we go to print, we are proactively contacting over 30,000 people in the RAF community who we know are in high-risk categories for COVID-19, and we are finding heart-wrenching levels of need. The ability of the Association to respond in such dire circumstances is critical, and the response of branches and members has been superb. Each of our more than 70,000 members plays a crucial role in helping us to step up our support for those who desperately need us."

"Even in 'normal life', our support is essential for thousands of individuals too," he continued. "And the camaraderie and RAF connection that comes with membership is extremely important. I am so proud that we are the largest single Service membership



Membership Type	2021 – 2022 Fee (£)	2019 - 2020 Fee (£)
Ordinary	24.50*	23.00
Ordinary 4 year	92.00	86.00
Associate 1 Year with Air Mail	17.00	16.00
Associate 4 Years with Air Mail	66.00	61.50
Associate 1 Year	13.00	12.00
Associate 4 Years	52.00	48.00

association. We are growing, and we are focusing on innovation and engagement for all our members. I am delighted you are with us."

See the Membership Subscription FAQs on the website for more information: rafa.org.uk/membershipFAQ.

Part of each subscription for members of a branch will be returned to the home branch and further details of this rebate will be communicated to Branch officials later in the year.

**Monthly fees collected through RAF pay from serving personnel under the Give As You Earn (GAYE) scheme will be £2.55 from January 2021. This includes a defined addition for tax relief.*

Left: Membership brings camaraderie and support: serving and veteran RAF personnel swapping stories at the Aylesbury and Halton Branch lunch club. Katie Rutherford © MOD/Crown 2018

New name added to The Few

80 years after the end of the Battle of Britain, another Spitfire pilot has been added to the ranks of The Few.

Sergeant James Eric William Ballard of No 610 (County of Chester) Squadron (pictured, right) has been posthumously added to the list, after his logbook was discovered. It shows an operational sortie flown on 8 October 1940, a flight that was confirmed by the signatures of his commanding officer and flight commander.

As the Battle of Britain is considered to have taken place between 10 July and 31 October 1940, the RAF Air Historical Branch has concluded that Sergeant Ballard meets the criteria to be awarded the Battle of Britain Clasp to the 1939-45 Star.

Group Captain Patrick Tootal, OBE, Secretary of the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust, said: "It is rare to be able to add a new name to the list of those who took part, especially a Spitfire pilot. Such was the desperate need then for fighter pilots that Sergeant Ballard had only nine hours of flying time before joining his squadron."

More from the Battle of Britain Memorial: bit.ly/TheFew_new



© BBMT



Helping carers to 'fly through the fog'

New website goes live to help dementia carers serving in the Royal Air Force.

The RAF Association has teamed up with Alzheimer's Society and CGI to launch the first phase of its new 'Navigating Dementia' project. A bespoke online hub, dementia.rafa.org.uk, has been created specifically for people in the serving RAF community who are caring for family members with dementia. It links them with other carers and families affected by dementia, provides a vital knowledge hub and steers them towards further resources and support.

Research by Alzheimer's Society has estimated that 70,000 people with an RAF background have dementia. The RAF Association's 2018 Characteristics Study, which sought to understand the social, geographical and biological characteristics of the RAF community also identified that 9% of serving RAF personnel have unpaid caring responsibilities for an older adult.

Rory O'Connor, Director of Welfare and Policy at the Association, says: "There is a wealth of published evidence that suggests serving RAF personnel and their families face more barriers in such situations than their civilian counterparts, such as frequent relocation and deployment. Caring for a parent with dementia when not living close to them is an additional challenge that many RAF families face."

"We knew from our research and pilot projects that members of the serving RAF community wanted to be able to find relevant information in one place and to link with other people in similar circumstances. So we are providing a forum to discuss topics, 'ask the expert' webinars, an events calendar and opportunities to plan self-supporting groups and meet-ups. There are also links to resources and information, regional breakdowns of dementia support, space for people to share their stories and answers to frequently asked questions."

"We aim to strengthen connections to other RAF families with similar experiences, enhance resilience, and improve understanding of how to support someone affected by dementia for as many of the



Above: An estimated 70,000 people with dementia have an RAF background © Alzheimer's Society

RAF community as need this help," he continued.

The online hub has been created with generous pro-bono support from CGI, a leading defence and security software and IT services supplier. "We are very grateful to CGI for developing this important new resource with us," said Rachel Huxford, Director of Fundraising, Marketing and Trading at the Association. "Their expertise will benefit dementia carers very directly, and is testament to CGI's impressive commitment to supporting the UK's military community."

Neil Timms, Senior Vice-President Space, Defence and Intelligence at CGI in the UK said: "Sadly dementia affects many families, so we were delighted, as part of our commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, to support RAFA in creating the Navigating Dementia platform. It is vital that we exploit digital channels to enable communities to access the information and support they need wherever they are. In these challenging times I am very proud of the joint RAFA and CGI team that have made this happen so rapidly."

£70,000 has also been awarded to the project by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust. This will enable the Association to broaden the reach of the online hub to the wider RAF community, supporting veterans as well as serving families.

Phase two of the project will begin later this year with the launch of face-to-face training courses for serving RAF personnel and their managers. This element of the Navigating Dementia project is being generously supported by the RAF Association's High Wycombe Branch.

"Before the Navigating Dementia hub there was no tailor-made support for people in the serving RAF family affected by dementia," added Mr O'Connor. "Dementia remains a national health priority, and we are responding to the needs of the population the Association serves, and to the national health and social care agenda."

"Before, there was no tailor-made support for people in the RAF affected by dementia"



Left: Squadron Leader Richard Lewis (far left) and Flight Lieutenant Rosie Brooks (far right); both have personal experience of caring for someone with dementia, and played a central role in the development of the project. Dr Prema Nirgude (front left) and James Kew-Moss (centre back) led the research and piloted the support projects for the RAF Association, partnering with Natasha Howard from Alzheimer's Society. All pictured at the RAF Association's first research symposium in October 2019. © Phil Greig.

“Magic” VE Day events



Necessity is the mother of invention and the Association's VE Day events were magnificently ingenious.

While some members across the world quietly used their permitted, socially-distanced daily exercise to pay their respects at local war memorials and others decorated their homes, Association standard bearers, joined in a virtual commemoration. More than 45 had paraded their standards in their gardens, and the photos were released on VE Day in a special Association video, with Squadron Leader (Padre) Stuart Shaw of RAF Wittering reading the dedication.

This was shared with more than 13,400 people through a special VE Day email from the Association, and on social media.

A newly composed poem comparing the battles of WWII with today's battles for our health and the health of our nations was recorded by a diverse range of people from across our RAF community, including veterans, serving members and air cadets. Familiar faces included Chief of the Air Staff, Association President and Carol Vorderman.

Former Flight Lieutenant Douglas Newham LVO DFC, a Bomber Command veteran, shared his full memories of VE Day and his role in the Second World War. These included: "The overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude spread across the whole country. We had 'made it', we had survived, we had emerged into the sunshine. In the villages, towns and cities across the land the streets suddenly blossomed with flags and bunting. The church bells – silenced in 1940 and to be used only as a sign of invasion – rang out in gratitude, there was dancing in the streets, neighbour hugged neighbour." Now 98 years old, he is currently volunteering for the Association's Op CONNECT telephone befriending service.

And finally, a day-long celebration in song saw four different vocal artists have more than 100,000 views through live broadcasts from their homes and gardens. This VE Day special from the Project ENTERTAIN team was particularly popular. Comments from people watching live included: "It was my grandad's funeral this morning and although he was too young to fight in WW2, he joined up with the RAF straight after it ended. I could not attend the funeral but I am listening today as my way of remembering him. Thanks for the lovely show", "We are so v appreciative - this is magic", and "All my favourites. What a lovely afternoon listening... Thank you so much to you and the RAF Association".

Catch up with all the videos, poems, singing and memories on the Association's VE Day web page: bit.ly/RAFA_VE75
Read Doug Newham's full story at: bit.ly/D_Newham

Above: Standard bearers were not allowed to parade in Hornsea Memorial Gardens, so Mel Watson paraded the Grimsby, Cleethorpes and District Branch standard and observed the two minutes silence outside his house. Below left: "We decked our house out, flew the RAF ensign and put on WWII RAF uniform to celebrate VE Day and paid our respects at 1100hrs", said Doug Pearce, ex Royal Auxillary Air Force and member of Corsham and Chippenham Branch. Below right: Unable to attend any organised public gatherings to celebrate VE Day, Hartlepool Branch members Bill and Brenda Bird celebrated at home with RAFA windmills and wearing their Association t-shirts. © Images all courtesy of contributors



RAF Anniversaries

25 yrs ago (1995)

Aug 1: In Operation Deliberate Force, Harriers based in Italy attack Serbian targets in Bosnia.

75 yrs ago (1945)

Jul 21: The RAF began a nine-day offensive against the Japanese 14th Army, flying 3,045 sorties. The end of this battle signified the end of the war in Burma.

Jul 31: The longest combat operation by a land plane during WWII was flown by a Liberator: it spent 24 hours 10 minutes airborne.

Aug 6: First atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Aug 14: Japan formally accepted surrender terms.

Aug 20: Mosquitos carried out the RAF's last bombing operation of WWII, attacking Japanese troops in Burma. Coincidentally, the same squadron (110) had also carried out the first bombing operation of the war on 4 September 1939 when it attacked the German ship the Admiral Scheer.

Aug 29: Operation Birdcage: after Japan's surrender, Liberators began dropping 150 tons of leaflets over known prisoner-of-war camps. These were followed by food and medical supplies.

Aug 30: RAF teams parachuted into Singapore Island to negotiate the safe release of prisoners of war. Over the following days other teams reached camps in Burma, Siam, and Malaya.

Sept 2: The Second World War formally ended with the unconditional surrender of Japan.

Sept 3: Squadron Leader Frank McKenna of the RAF's Special Investigation Branch arrived in Germany to investigate the execution of 50 RAF personnel after the Great Escape. This led to a trial in 1947 at which 13 people were sentenced to hang, two received life sentences, and two more received 10-year sentences.

Sept 6: An RAF Mosquito broke the east-west transatlantic record by flying from RAF St Mawgan to Torbay, Newfoundland in seven hours.

100 yrs ago (1920)

Jul 3: First RAF Tournament (later known as the RAF Pageant then the RAF Display) took place at Hendon. It attracted 60,000 spectators.

Correction: The January RAF Anniversaries should have read: Hugh Trenchard was reappointed Chief of Air Staff on 15 February 1919 (not 31 March 1920).

100 years of Cranwell memories needed

RAF College Cranwell is appealing for your memories to help celebrate its 100th year.

The recollections will be collated in a special written and oral history – from former cadets, staff and others with connections. Submissions can be made throughout the centenary year, until early 2021.

Download and complete a simple, interactive form to share your memories, your postings since graduating, and your achievements: rafa.org.uk/rafcollegevoices



Refreshing relationship

Rare Tea Company has renewed its relationship with the RAF Association and pledged to continue raising funds and awareness.

The commitment is part of an update of the organisation's whole range, unveiled in June. The company linked up with the Association in 2010 when 'tea lady' Henrietta Lovell met Battle of Britain navigator Terry Clark and created a special Breakfast Tea for Heroes in his honour. Since then it has donated 50p for every tin sold.

"I saw the relationship Terry still had with the RAF at Linton-on-Ouse (where he had served), and how much it gave to him to be part of that family still. It's family and community that I care about, and I found that with the RAF and the Association's sense of belonging, and of supporting one another. Who wouldn't want to be part of that?"

Talking about the history of tea drinking she added: "Before the war people spent more on tea as a percentage of their income than on alcohol. They used to buy the flavours they liked loose from the grocer. It was just seen as choice, not 'posh'. There is no reason that today our tea can't be drunk in the same way that people will drink everyday table wines but then buy a bottle of champagne for a special occasion.

"Our tea costs a bit more because we pay a fair amount direct to the tea growers and we invest in their communities so their life expectancy can rise above the appallingly common 40's. It might cost



a little more in cash, but it supports rather than exploits – and doesn't cost the environment."

Find out more and order tea from bit.ly/RAFATRADfoodanddrink

Terry Clark died on 7 May at the age of 101. His obituary is on page 65.

Above: A new "Spitfire paint job" has graced tins of Breakfast Tea for Heroes since June. © Rare Tea Co.



The Quaranteam issued the challenge to cycle 100 miles at home in RAFARides:Virtual ©RAF Association

Typhoon Display's huge generosity

More than £5,000 was raised by RAF Coningsby's Typhoon Display team during their 2019 season, which has been donated towards the work of the RAF Association.

Acting Senior RAF Association Liaison Officer at the station, Acting Corporal John Bryce said: "The entire RAFA team here were completely blown away by their generosity, and we would like to take this opportunity to pass on our greatest thanks for their hard work and dedication."

Sergeant Michael Maw, the display team PR Manager said: "It has been my honour and privilege to have raised £5,290.50 for such a key charity as RAFA. It is thanks to my dedicated team of volunteers deployed to air shows across the UK during the season, coupled with the huge generosity of the general public, that such an amount was raised."

Fundraising news

Replacement ride raises thousands

Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall and a newly-formed 'Quaranteam' threw down the gauntlet this June in RAFA Rides:Virtual 2020. Disappointed by the postponement of the RAFARides:2020 cycle because of COVID-19, and keen to raise funds for the Association's emergency appeal, the team of ten decided to don their lycra and use static bikes and peleton software to ride 100 miles 'together' from their own homes. 225 people in 32 teams swiftly accepted the challenge, including Team RAF Cycling Association, CGI, RAF Valley Cycling Club, Team Northolt, Team Virtual Leeming, The Roaming Cheetahs, Cranwell College HQ, and Boeing and, as Air Mail went to press, more than £31,000 had been pledged in sponsorship. Find out the latest totals at: bit.ly/RAFARidesVirtual
RAFARides:2020 has been rescheduled for 3 October 2020.
Sign up and more info: bit.ly/RAFARides2020



RAF Typhoon Display pilot Flight Lieutenant Jim Peterson handed over the cheque to Corporal Dave Holmes of RAF Coningsby's RAFALO team and the Typhoon Display team, watched by key representatives from both organisations. ©MOD/Crown 2019

100th birthdays

John Cruickshank VC

John Cruickshank VC, the RAF's last living recipient of the Victoria Cross and President of the Association's Aberdeen Branch, celebrated his 100th birthday on 20 May.

The day John won his VC – 17 July 1944 – he was flying with 210 Squadron as a Flight Lieutenant, having already completed 24 operational sorties plus many non-operational flights. That day, John's Catalina flying boat took off to provide anti-submarine cover for ships involved in Operation Mascot; an attempt by carrier-based aircraft to destroy the German battleship Tirpitz moored near Norway's North Cape.

When a U-boat was sighted on the surface, John attacked, in the face of fierce anti-aircraft fire. His depth charges failed to release. He turned for another attack and managed to sink the U-boat, but not before his navigator/bomb aimer had been killed, three other crew members injured, and John himself struck in seventy-two places; including two serious wounds in the lungs. His aircraft was badly damaged, but he refused morphine and ensured it was under control before allowing his wounds to be tended. John then continued to monitor the Catalina's progress during the five-and-a-half hour flight back to base, at the end of which he refused to allow the aircraft to be brought down until the conditions of light and sea made this possible without undue risk.

Aberdeen Branch has been involved with others in organising a small private celebration for John, which has been postponed until lockdown is lifted in Scotland.



John Cruickshank © AJK

stage of training on wireless equipment, but was instead sent out to India, where there was a shortage of wireless operators.

After landing in Bombay, John took a 1,000 mile train journey to Central Wireless Station (CWS) just outside Ambala, in the Punjab. He was promoted to sergeant and wrote frequently to his father back

home in Yorkshire, who kept the letters and made copies of his replies. These letters offered a snapshot of everyday life on the subcontinent during the war. [See 'Letters from India', Air Mail July-Sept 2019.]

In 2013 John moved to Tywyn in Wales, where local Association members encouraged him to join. Although forced to spend his birthday in hospital, John nonetheless celebrated the day with members of the Association's Towyn and Aberdovey Branch.



John Hazzlewood © John Hazzlewood

May Topple

May Topple celebrated her 100th birthday on 23 March. May grew up in Suffolk and joined the WRAF in 1942. She trained as a cook before transferring to RAF Cosford then RAF Stradishall, where she served for the rest of the war. Leading Aircraftwoman Topple was demobbed in 1945 and returned to Felixstowe, having married in 1944.

As well as being a member of the RAF Association's Woodbridge Branch, May has also been a member and active supporter of the WAAF Association for many years. She continues to live independently, and is looking forward to celebrating her milestone 100th year with her family once the COVID-19 restrictions have been eased.



May Topple © May Topple



Brian Engel © Brian Engel

Gordon Engel

Gordon Engel celebrated his 100th birthday in March. He has been an Association member for more than half a century.

Volunteering for the RAF in 1938, aged 18, Gordon trained as a wireless operator and air gunner and joined 77 Squadron flying Mark 5 Whitleys.

Gordon's aircraft was damaged during his first mission and crash-landed on its return, badly injuring him. After months of recovery, on only his third mission, there was a mysterious explosion

below the rear turret. Returning to base, the aircraft also crash-landed; killing all aboard except Gordon, who was again badly injured.

While recovering, Gordon acted as a temporary military policeman before being transferred to radio ops duty at RAF Hawkinge. He was promoted to sergeant and later served in North Africa as part of Operation Torch, becoming unofficially attached to a US regiment of combat engineers building Ras el Ma aerodrome. Having had no contact with the RAF – who had reported him as missing – Gordon stayed with the Americans until Ras el Ma was handed over by the RAF after El Alamein. He left the Service in 1946.

John Hazzlewood

In February, John Hazzlewood celebrated his 100th birthday. John joined the RAF five days after Britain declared war on Germany. He was initially selected as a night fighter pilot, after completing the first

RAF Charities' news

News from the RAF Benevolent Fund

Air Vice-Marshal (AVM) Chris Elliot joined the RAF Benevolent Fund as Controller/Chief Executive in April. She said: "It's an honour to be taking on this role. While I have no doubt that the year ahead will be a tough one, in these challenging times we are adapting to support those that need us most. I look forward to driving the Fund forward so we can continue supporting the RAF Family at this uncertain time".

Support through COVID-19

The Fund has introduced a weekly check and chat service and expanded its telephone friendship groups service and its access to grants for individuals. It has made £2,500 available for each RAF station to provide an activity and wellbeing pack for RAF children, and staff at Princess Marina House, the Fund's care and respite centre, have been contacting regular guests to ensure they are okay and identify any further needs. So far, across all types of calls, the Fund estimates that it has reached out and connected with more than 1,300 people.

All Stations podcast

The second series of the Fund's All Stations podcast will be launched in July to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. The Fund says the series "will come as a fitting opportunity to commit to the airwaves the heroes who fought for our freedoms all those years ago". Listen here: rafbf.org/news-blogs/all-stations-podcast



Air Vice-Marshal Chris Elliot, who started her job as Controller of the RAF Benevolent Fund in April.

Better prepared for life overseas

According to recent research, Service-provided information has not always prepared RAF families for life overseas. The RAF Families Federation has set out to bridge that information gap with a project to enhance their website.

The cultural and travel experiences that come with an overseas post are appealing for many. However, often the process of moving



Jade Coe: "Can't wait to move things forward" for RAF personnel about to embark on a life overseas. © RAF Families Federation

overseas is a complex one to navigate for RAF personnel and their families. The findings of the 2019 Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FamCAS) highlight that only 27% of spouses who had moved overseas said that they had been able to access service-provided information without difficulty.

Prompted by this finding, the RAF Families Federation and RAF Community Support conducted their own surveys to further explore the experiences of RAF personnel serving overseas. These highlighted the gaps in the information, most notably on welfare support, childcare provision and accompanying partner's career.

The Families Federation is now starting a project to develop the overseas section of its website, with RAF Community Support as a key stakeholder, and a range of other RAF and Ministry of Defence stakeholders. The aim is to provide a single community information portal where personnel and their families can go for guidance on preparing for life overseas as well as accurate and relevant location information. If relevant websites or information exist already, links will be clearly incorporated.

The project is a significant undertaking, and to ensure successful delivery the Families Federation has taken on a new web content officer. Jade Coe joined the team in April to evolve the website and develop the overseas content. Jade comments: "I come to the Families Federation with 12 years digital marketing experience. Phase one will be pulling together a step-by-step guide for personnel and their families, combining formal processes and personal ones. Additionally, a test location will be selected in the USA and I'll begin compiling information to build a central repository for 'on arrival' information. The number and diversity of locations make this project challenging and exciting for me."

To take a look at the overseas information from the RAF Families Federation visit rafbf.org.uk/overseas. If you have any questions about the project, direct them to: Jade.Coe@rafbf.org.uk

Caring for
someone with
dementia...
can feel like flying
through fog.



We're here to
help you **navigate**
the way.

Thousands in the RAF community care for someone with dementia. Our new **Navigating Dementia service** can help you find the advice and support you need.

Caring for a loved one with dementia can be bewildering and challenging. Sometimes, it's hard to know where or who to turn to for help. Often, it can feel like you're lost.

Now, the RAF Association can guide you through the fog. We've teamed up with Alzheimer's Society to create a new service called Navigating Dementia.

This bespoke online hub connects you to other carers and families affected by dementia, and steers you towards further resources and support.

If you care for someone with dementia, or you know someone in the RAF community who does, visit rafa.org.uk/dementia now to find out more.

For 90 years, we've supported the RAF community through all kinds of adversity. Now, through Navigating Dementia, we can help you face one of your greatest ever challenges.



In 2014 the order to scramble Typhoons was given 21 times - to check up on unidentified aircraft, uncommunicative Russian bombers and more. © MOD/Crown 2019

Below: The F35-Lightnings will be based at RAF Marham in Norfolk and on the UK's two new aircraft carriers: HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. © MOD/Crown 2020

Hoodwinking the enemy

"I only need to know where the enemy is; not point at it."

80 years after the Battle of Britain, we look at No. 1 Group's modern-day air defences; the Typhoon Force on permanent alert to defend one million square miles of our air space, and the Lightning Force preparing for the future defence of the realm.



"In the film Jurassic Park, 'the ranger' goes out to hunt down the matriarch velociraptor. He finally sees her, through the trees, looking straight back at him. And, while the hunter is concentrating on her, he fails to see the other two velociraptors either side of him, who deliver the kill. This is a simple but effective example of how the RAF's 4th generation and 5th generation stealth assets work together to be lethal."

Wing Commander Scott 'Mox' Williams, Officer Commanding 207 Squadron based at RAF Marham, is describing some of the Combat Air capability of the RAF and Fleet Air Arm in 2020 and beyond. He explains further: "The Typhoon FGR4 is that matriarch - it's an amazingly powerful aircraft with a large arsenal of weapons and its way of operating is not inherently stealthy. The F-35B Lightning may have fewer weapons, but its fusion of information from multiple trusted sources

allows the pilot to quickly observe, orientate, decide and act - all without being seen on radar, and while working in perfect harmony with other UK and allied F-35 Lightnings, and 4th generation aircraft.

Mox's grandfather-in-law was a WWII gunner; a wireless operator with an electrical engineering background. When he was alive, both used to talk about differences between the aircraft of their times: "He would have been absolutely blown away by the computational aspects of the F-35 and its systems now. But it is all relative. The Second World War's cutting-edge scientific developments in flight, observer posts, radar and radio have taught us lessons that have entirely shaped the development of military aviation through the ages. First it was all about going faster - the jet age was about speed. Then it was all about missiles - the bigger your missile, the more chances you had of success in a fight;

then radar advances. Once missiles could be countered, it became all about agility - so aircraft had to be able to dog fight in the 1970s and 80s. Now we do all of those things in the age of true electronic and cyber warfare; it's as much about 'hoodwinking' the enemy."

Typhoon Force

As in the Battle of Britain, the key role of the RAF has always been to protect the skies of Britain and its territories. While we haven't faced a sustained mass onslaught of bombers and fighters since the 1940s, our safety does depend on our Quick Reaction Alert force. News of recent incidents can be found on the RAF's website, but the last official figures available show that in 2014 the order to scramble was given 21 times to check up on unidentified aircraft, uncommunicative Russian bombers, or to watch over hostile nations' naval assets passing close by our island home.

Since June 2007, this critical response has been fulfilled by the RAF's Typhoon FGR4s.

The primary responsibility of No. 1 Group, QRA is supported by hundreds of highly-trained specialists on duty across the nation every second of every year. The National Air and Space Operations Centre at RAF Air Command in High Wycombe is the tactical command. Its eyes and ears, collating information from radar sites across the UK, from intelligence and from civilian air traffic control to identify possible threats are the Control and Reporting Centres at RAF Boulmer and RAF Scampton. More than 6,000 civilian and military flights a day are monitored in normal circumstances, looking for uncommunicative or off track aircraft, and unusual behaviour patterns. If there is a need to scramble a response, the decision is made by the National Representative, and passed through Control and Reporting Centres which



The Typhoon carries a variety of ordnance.”
© MOD/Crown 2016
‘Fly with the Quick Reaction Alert Crews’ on Youtube:
bit.ly/No1GpQRA

have direct contact with Typhoon pilots and engineers on permanent readiness at RAF Lossiemouth. Pilots have to be in the cockpit and ready for the ‘go’ order, or in the air, within minutes of the initial decision being made. Meanwhile, at the UK’s second QRA station, RAF Coningsby, crews are ordered to stand by and at RAF Brize Norton, Voyagers with air-to-air refuelling capability are also readied for takeoff. Air-to-air refuelling allows the aircraft to operate for longer, over a larger distance.

Four squadrons of Typhoons are based at RAF Lossiemouth: No. 1 (Fighter); No. II (Army Cooperation); No. 6 and No. IX (Bomber) Squadrons. At RAF Coningsby we find: No. 3 (Fighter); No. XI (Fighter); No. 12; No. 29 (the Operational Conversion Unit, or OCU) and No. 41 Squadrons. New squadrons are still being formed. The latest at RAF Lossiemouth is IX(B) Squadron, which re-rolled from Tornado at RAF Marham to Typhoon in early 2019. It is now a dedicated fourth-generation aggressor squadron, simulating the tactics and procedures of our adversaries to provide the best training to our front-line pilots. 12 Squadron re-rolled from Tornado at RAF Marham to Typhoon at RAF Coningsby as a Joint British-Qatari Typhoon Squadron.

Typhoon pilot Flight Lieutenant Dawe of II(AC) Squadron says: “The nature of the threats we face in the modern age are vastly different; when we are scrambled we may not know the nature of the incident but it is important that we get to it as quickly as possible to ensure that the situation does not escalate.

“When we are in the air, we talk to Battlespace Managers and Air Traffic Controllers who guide us towards targets, similar to what would have happened during the Battle of Britain.

“The differences are in the technology. The Typhoon has its own radar which can detect and identify threats miles away. It’s capable of travelling faster than the speed of sound, which is key to getting to a target as quickly as possible. Rather than being solely reliant on looking out of the canopy and listening to controllers on the ground, our radar and speed mean that we are much better equipped to quickly deal with any situation that may present itself.”

Describing the experience of flying the jet,

Flight Lieutenant Dawe says: “The feeling you get during performance take-offs with full reheat is something you can never forget – it’s mind-wateringly fast! The Typhoon has an abundance of power – I can fly both very high, and very fast. Thanks to the delta wing design and its massive engines, it can carry a variety of ordnance without any loss of performance.



It’s been fantastic to see the Typhoon evolve and transition from solely an air-to-air platform, into a multi-role aircraft that is capable of missions such as ground attack and close air support.”

Lightning Force

“The Typhoon is ideal for QRA and its considerable other duties around the world, working at its marauding best. The F-35B Lightning does things differently. It is more penetrative,” says Group Captain Jim Beck, Station Commander at RAF Marham. He describes himself as a ‘wannabe airline pilot who enjoyed the RAF too much’. He became a Tornado pilot and weapons instructor before he moved on to lead the Lightning Force. He’s been with the project since he flew with the Lightning test team in 2013. He continues: “This jet is so different. You merely ask it to do something and it does it. It will always keep you safe, it will always take you there. The jet does the dogfight, it sends the missile equipped with data. The challenge is to identify the enemy before they identify you.”

RAF Marham now has 15 F-35Bs. Three more

are arriving this year, six more in 2021 and another eight in 2022. The intention is to base them in Norfolk and on the UK’s two new aircraft carriers; HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. Very successful RAF and Royal Navy sea trials took place in the US in 2019 and in UK waters early in 2020. The force is 45% Navy and 55% RAF but, Jim continues: “I am a member of the Lightning Force. It is so seamless that we struggle to tell who is Navy and who is RAF at Marham.”

Mox, who trains the new Lightning pilots at RAF Marham, as well as still flying the aircraft says: “In the Battle of Britain, Dowding’s plotters and bunkers brought together information from the Chain Home RADAR, the Observer Corps, radio and intelligence, and even from the general public. And information was sent back out by radio to the pilots. That information all now goes into the cockpit of the Lightning in real time. The information is amazing, but crucially isn’t overwhelming for the pilot to quickly interpret. The Lightning pilot, whether on the ground or in the air, can know the position, speed, altitude, fuel levels and weapons status and situational awareness of any other F-35 in its group, even if they are miles away.

“So it’s about information dominance and hoodwinking the enemy. If you can do that in the airborne environment and if you can control that information - but you know deep down the truth - then you have an advantage,” Mox continues. “This is where we are today. The F-35 is an extremely powerful and capable system, and the potential to mature these capabilities (and add more) across its anticipated life of service to the UK is truly immense. As such, it’s going to be a steep challenge for an adversary to know exactly what the aircraft can and cannot do. Stealth is a very important aspect, but is only one of many advantages F-35 brings, and it’s very difficult for an opponent to counter them all.”

Whereas some pilots in the Battle of Britain are known to have got little more than nine hours flying training before going into combat, new Lightning pilots are already fast jet graduates from RAF Valley and RAF Leeming. They then complete seven weeks at ground school before joining 207 Squadron.



Almost 50% of the next stage of their training is in an extraordinarily high fidelity simulator “and we throw them some curve balls, so the experience is intuitive when they fly for real,” says Mox. “On their first sorties in the aircraft we fly alongside them – it’s like having a supportive hand on their shoulder. And when we ask ‘how did it go?’ they all say ‘it’s just like the simulator, but the view’s much better’” With the aircraft coming in at £92million each (a Spitfire in today’s money would have cost around £280,000) that world class level of training is critical.

Six students are currently going through the course, and some of them will quickly become instructors as the Lightning Force grows in mass. Support personnel also get trained in the simulator in RAF Marham’s Integrated Training Centre: highly skilled engineers, ground crew, mission support such as avionics, and armourers. They are drawn from the RAF and the Navy, plus civilian workforce, industry contributors and reservist members of the team. Mox says: “There is no doubt the pilots are standing on the shoulders of the giants that are the mission support team – it’s a whole force approach.”

The Lightning is unusual in allied defence. The Typhoon has many British components and the Eurofighter project as a whole is a British, German, Italian, and Spanish collaboration. With the F35, the American’s have focused on one aircraft and Britain was a ‘tier one partner’. 25% of its research and development and design team is in the UK, and 15% of it is built here. For every one pound we spend on it, three pounds goes back into our economy and between 17,000 and 25,000 UK jobs depend on it.

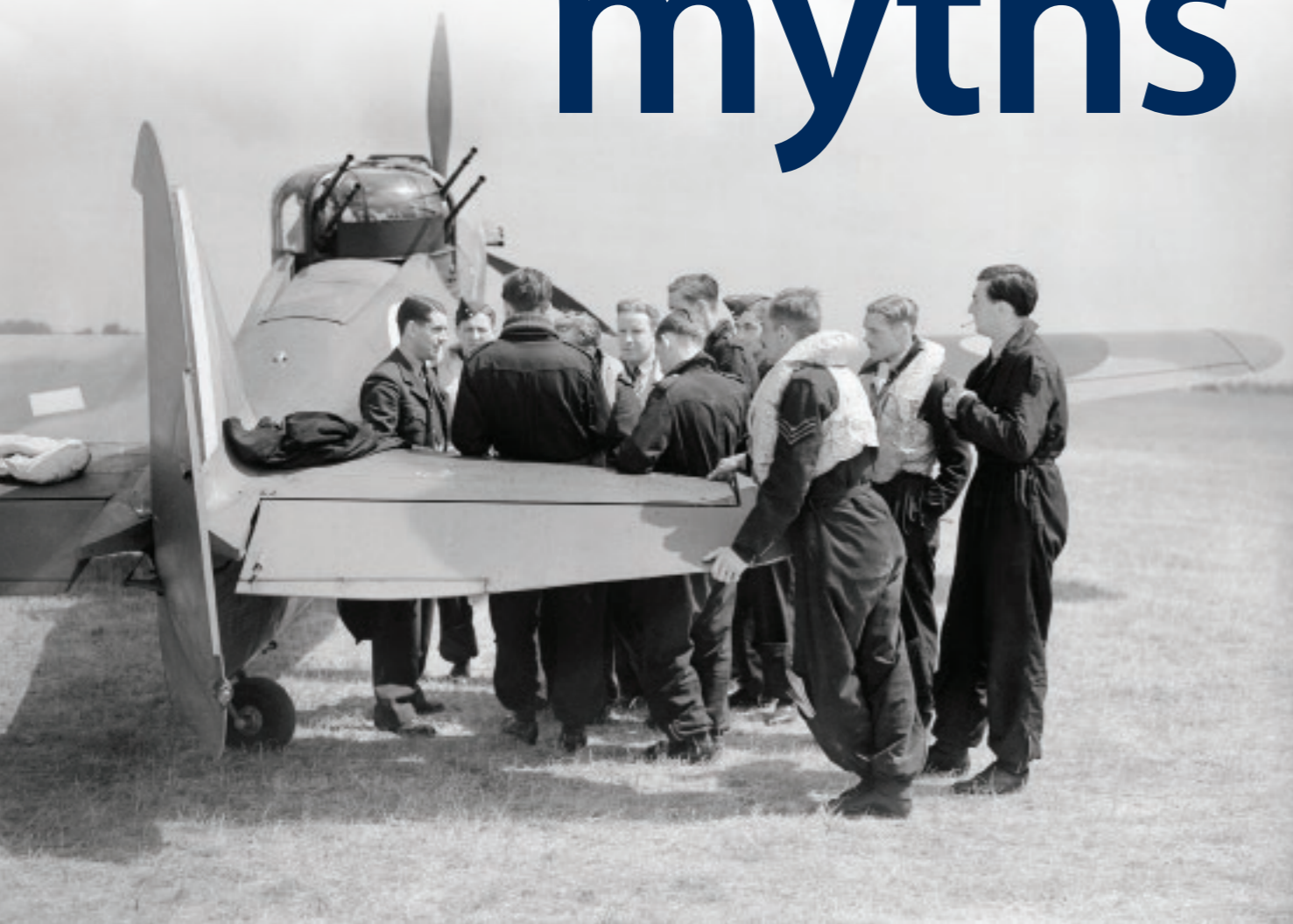
Jim Beck rounds the story up: “This aircraft’s journey is just beginning. The days of old school formation flying are over: it’s now about a neural network. The potency of these aircraft grows exponentially; they do fly in formations, but they are 50 miles apart. I fly with two iPads on my legs and a helmet screen. Now I only need to know where the enemy is; not point at it.” AM



Above: “When we are scrambled we may not know the nature of the incident”. Typhoons on quick reaction alert. © MOD/Crown 2018

“An extremely powerful and capable system”. An F35-B Lightning hovers over the deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth. MOD/Crown 2019

Defying the myths



The crucial role played by the Spitfire and the Hurricane in the Battle of Britain has been exhaustively recorded, but very little has been written about the third British fighter which took part. Robert Verkaik, journalist and author has turned his forensic gaze on the Boulton Paul Defiant - writing from the unique perspective of the pilots and their air-gunners and uncovering new correspondence between Hugh Dowding and the Air

Staff. To mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, we provide an extract from his book, *Defiant: the untold story of the Battle of Britain*, published in June, and an exclusive question and answer session with the author.

Why do you think the Battle of Britain still has such an important place in the public's imagination today?

"It is Britain at its best: the plucky underdog fighting alone against the tyranny of the Nazis who threatened to turn back the clock of humanity. And right now many people have made comparisons with the threat of COVID-19 and the dark days of 1940. The stories of heroism and courage 80 years ago over skies of southern England have found a resonance in the countless examples of self-sacrifice made by those fighting on the NHS frontline of today."

Why did you choose to focus on military history, and the Boulton Paul Defiant in particular?

"It's a long story! I grew up close to Hawkinge airfield near Folkestone in Kent which was

the site of 'the slaughter of the innocent.' Like everybody else I accepted the myth that the Boulton Paul Defiant was a flawed concept and the tragedy of July 19th was unavoidable. Years later when I was going through my great uncle's First World War memoirs I read about how he flew a twin-seater, single engine fighter (Fe2b) also built by Boulton Paul. I spent the next two years joining up the dots which finally led to some startling conclusions."

When did you first realise there really was more to the Defiant's story than the received wisdom that it was just a flawed concept?

"For a long time I had dismissed the Defiant as a joke aircraft that got lucky when the Bf 109s momentarily mistook it for a Hurricane and were picked off

by the concentrated fire from the four Browning .303 machine guns when they dived on them from behind. But an examination of RAF pilots' combat reports showed that in the right hands the Defiants could work together in a protective circle to defend themselves against the German fighters. Over Dunkirk they were so successful at shooting down both bombers and fighters that 264 Squadron secured the record for destroying more enemy aircraft in one day than any other unit. A record which still stands today."

After you were first inspired by your uncle's diary, how did you set about researching the book?

"Once my interest was piqued I marched off to the National Archives in Kew to try to establish the evolution of the Defiant and its later combat role in Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain. Then I spent days in the Imperial War Museum (IWM) which holds the last audio and written testimonies of some of the Defiant aircrews who spoke so positively about their experience with the 'Daffy'. The British Library held the original

front page newspaper articles which proclaimed the success of the Defiant at Dunkirk. But the most rewarding part of my research was tracking down the families of the two squadron leaders who commanded Defiant squadrons in the battle. They and the other families of the aircrews thought the Defiant's record had been unfairly blemished and was in need of rehabilitation. What I discovered was that the Defiant pilots and gunners fought just as bravely as the Hurricane and Spitfire crews helping to defend forward fighter bases during the climax of the Battle of Britain."

Were there any new or recently declassified pieces of evidence you were able to use in the book that haven't been seen elsewhere?

"Because the role of the turret fighter has been largely ignored by historians there was a lot of new material in the archives and the IWM which has not seen the light of day, some only recently opened to public inspection. The most interesting, in my opinion, is four years of heated correspondence between Hugh →



"There is also a secret memo Park wrote to Dowding in June 1940"

Top left: Squadron Leader Hunter, commanding officer of 264 Squadron, addressing his Defiant crews after successful action in 1940. © IWM/Air Historical Branch CH196

Bottom left: The aircraft that led to the book - the Boulton Paul Fe2d. The observer had to stand up to operate the rear machine gun. He also had a forward-firing machine gun. © Author's collection.

Above: Defiant N1650, seen here during a test flight, was delivered to the RAF on 5 August 1940, just as the Battle of Britain got going.

The Defiant was affectionately referred to as 'Daffy' by the aircrews. © RAF in Combat
Right: 264 Squadron was recalled to the front line of the Battle of Britain in August 1940. © RAF in Combat





"264 Squadron secured the record for destroying [most] enemy aircraft in one day"

Contact Robert Verkaik via: bobbyverkaik@hotmail.co.uk or write to him c/o Air Mail at the address in the front of the magazine. Robert is the former security editor of the Mail on Sunday who now writes for the Guardian, Independent, i, Tortoise, Observer, Times, Sunday Telegraph and Sunday Times. His reporting has been long-listed for both the Orwell Prize and the Paul Foot Awards. He was runner-up in the specialist journalist category at the 2013 National Press Awards. He is also the author of *Jihadi John: The Making of a Terrorist*, and *Posh Boys: How English Public Schools Ruin Britain*.



Top left: Defiants race to engage enemy bombers. © RAF in Combat Above: In the Battle of Britain, Robert Verkaik's great uncle George Heseltine (second from left) was serving with RAF intelligence. Author's collection Left: Author Robert Verkaik during his research for the book. Author's collection. Below: Newspaper headlines celebrating the Defiant's (still unbroken) record for the most enemy aircraft destroyed in one day. © Daily Telegraph



£5 off - reader offer:
To buy a copy of 'Defiant: the untold story of the Battle of Britain' for £15 (RRP £20) call Little Brown's customer service team on 01235 759 555 during office hours and quote: RAFADefiant. With apologies, this offer is only available to Air Mail readers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Offer ends 31 December 2020.

Dowding and the Air Ministry. The Air Staff wanted a twin-seater bomber destroyer to be the cutting edge of the defence of the realm in the run up to the war – Dowding and Park had reservations and prioritised Spitfires and Hurricanes. There is also a secret memo Park wrote to Dowding in June 1940 after the Defiants had won plaudits for their success over Dunkirk. The vitriolic tone of Park's criticism of the Defiant is quite astonishing."

What was the most unexpected thing you discovered during your research, or the evidence or fact that you were most pleased to find?

"I think the Air Ministry reports of Squadron Leader Philip Hunter's trials of a Defiant in simulated dogfights with a Spitfire and a Bf 109. In both tests the Defiant came out on top."

Some of your other books give evidence that knocks British establishment systems. Do you think your readers will be surprised by your obvious passion for the Battle of Britain in Defiant?

"I think the values we were fighting for in 1940 are the same values I have spoken up for in my previous books. The right to be given a fair hearing or a fair start in life underpin a British sense of justice or our belief in fair play. If the British establishment fails to protect these values then it needs to be called out."

After reading Defiant, what would be the one thing you'd like readers to remember?

"The courage and quality of the aircrews and their commanding officers who fought bravely against overwhelming odds yet never questioned the fighting qualities of the aircraft they flew. The question that is left hanging is what would have happened if the Air Staff had got its way and a third of RAF fighter squadrons in the Battle of Britain had been equipped with Defiants?"

Do any other aspects of the RAF – past or present – interest you? If so, what and why?

"I think the air defence of Malta in 1942 is fascinating. It was a mini rerun of the Battle of Britain and once again proved the tactical leadership skills of Keith Park, perhaps the unsung hero of 1940."

Is there anything else you'd like to add for our readers, who are all serving or veteran RAF personnel, or their supporters?

"Dowding's memoirs reveal that something happened during the Battle of Britain which he never talked about but which he believed was an example of 'divine intervention'. Whatever happened it proved to Dowding beyond any doubt that God was on the side of the RAF. To this day I don't know to what event he was referring. Do any of your readers?"

In this edited extract, we join the book in Chapter Five, in the fraught run up to the war, before the Defiant, Spitfire and Hurricane had been able to prove themselves in battle.

War now seemed unavoidable. Dowding, watching on with interest from his headquarters at Bentley Priory, continued to focus his attention on building a fighter defence system which could repel a large German air attack. Correspondence between the Air Ministry and Fighter Command showed the air marshals remained fixated by the threat of the bomber and the means to neutralize it.

The job of neutralizing and testing modern bomber destroyer tactics was given to Professor Bennet Melvill Jones... The initial results convinced [him] that the German bomber formations could be best defeated using free-gun fighter aircraft. [He] had been experimenting with overtaking manoeuvres that would allow Defiants to use the 'windage' to help bring overwhelming firepower to bear on the enemy from the flanks.

Suddenly, Dowding, who hitherto had done all in his power to rid his fighter force of the Defiant, became very interested in this idea and wrote to the Air Ministry with tentative enthusiasm... He followed this up with a memo to Augustus Orlebar, Director of Flying Training at the Air Fighting Development Establishment at RAF Northolt... "Will you make some trials with the Defiant and let me know how they work out?"

The reason for Dowding's apparent change in attitude towards the Defiant is not obvious. Perhaps he had finally accepted the thinking behind the concept of the turret fighter, or perhaps he was worried that the Nazi bombers would be too well armoured against his fixed-gun rear attacks. Whatever the reason Dowding, who placed his trust in scientific experiment, was at last able to subject the Defiant to rigorous trials, the results of which the Air Ministry would have to be bound by.

Of course Defiant was only a small part of Dowding's overall concern. He urgently needed to

test his entire fighter defence system against a dummy attack of invading bombers. But the head of Bomber Command, Ludlow-Hewitt, had demonstrated a marked reluctance to fully cooperate with exercises run by Fighter Command...

Dowding's official complaints about Ludlow-Hewitt, aided and abetted by Keith Park, eventually forced Bomber Command to engage in meaningful cooperation. In August 1939, five hundred bombers were flown against Dowding's fighter defences, covering a third of the country, in the biggest air exercise since the end of the First World War. It ran for four days and nights, although complete blackouts were impossible.

Dowding learned valuable lessons from the operation enabling him to test and then tighten his defences. His filtering system, based at Bentley Priory, was tweaked so that Observer Corps reports could be fully coordinated with radar tracking, which were directly fed into radio communications with the squadrons and on to the individual fighters in the air. It was a system that Dowding spent almost six years perfecting.

Throughout all these exercises and preparations it was accepted without question that the bombers would be flying from bases in Germany and would be unprotected by fighters.

Given the known range of fighters at this time, that was a reasonable assumption. However, it meant that the Air Ministry need only focus on tactics for sending up fighters to shoot down bombers and not draw up contingency plans for tackling escorts. Nor had Fighter Command done enough to prepare for German night raids...

After the August dress rehearsal Dowding was sufficiently satisfied to make his first public broadcast, reassuring the nation that the

exercise proved Britain was well prepared for a German air assault, proclaiming: 'I confidently believe that a serious air attack on these islands would be brought to a standstill in a short period of time.' In a confidential report of the operation, Dowding reaffirmed this confidence, informing the Air Ministry, 'While I am far from implying that the present system is perfect, I feel that a very great advance has been made during the past year in the mechanism of intercepting raids in the daylight.'

Dowding's confidence was predicated on the meaningful number and performance of the Hurricane and the critical arrival of a few Spitfires, with the promise of more to come. As to his third fighter, Dowding remained at best ambivalent. The Air Ministry had also been forced to rethink its position. In June 1939 Stevenson had quietly informed Dowding that the Air Ministry was scaling down its turret fighter requirements so that Fighter Command was to have six, not nine, Defiant squadrons. This merely reflected the reality of the retarded development of the Defiant [with production line problems]. But as soon

as Boulton Paul was able to restore its production targets these figures were to be upgraded. The Defiant remained stuck, its test phase and its early promise

limited to the results of its trials before its turret had been fitted. The introduction of the heavy turret with the gunner and ammunition left a serious question mark hanging over the new fighter's performance.

A second Defiant prototype had been designed to meet the weight and drag issues which Boulton Paul knew must be addressed before the Air Ministry and, more importantly, Dowding would be able to declare it fit for combat operations. This second prototype, which had flown for the first time

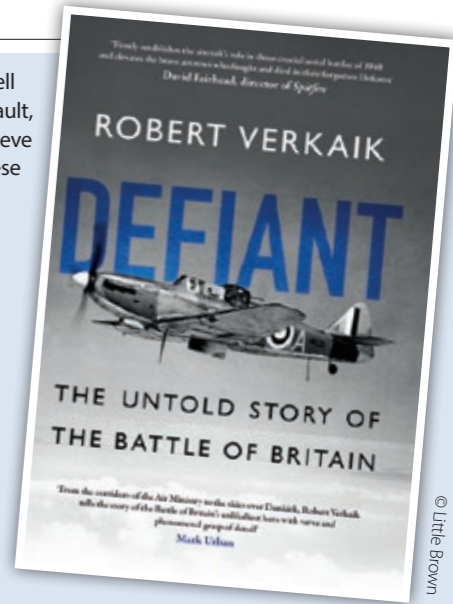
on 18 May 1939, incorporated a number of key design changes. The chief improvement was the introduction of the more powerful Merlin II engine, and later the Merlin III, which helped to compensate for the weight and drag of the turret so that the aircraft's performance was now more in line with pre-turret tests. The first production Defiant finally flew on 30 July, but by the start of September only one Defiant had been delivered to the RAF.

The Air Ministry, disappointed by the slow progress of its secret fighter, was determined Dowding should make full use of the small number of Defiants which were with the RAF. And once the production hold-up was eased, ministers fully expected Fighter Command to begin filling its squadrons with the Defiant.

On 10 August 1939 Harold Balfour, the Under Secretary of State for Air, wrote to Dowding asking him for a progress report on the Defiant fighter. Balfour, a First World War ace who had flown Sopwith Camels... could see the merits of a bomber destroyer, and was seriously concerned that not enough effort was being made to bring the Defiant to operational readiness.

But Dowding would not be rushed into equipping his squadrons with a third fighter that had not been fully combat tested. He waited almost a month before he replied to Balfour's letter, by which time Britain was at war.

(The book's considerable number of references have not been included in the extract).

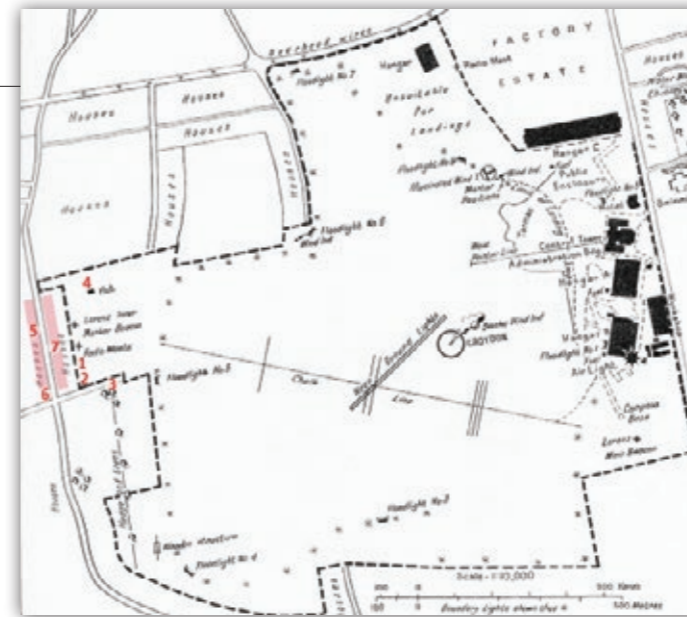


© Little Brown

The life of a Battle of Britain Flight Mechanic



Jeff Brereton volunteered for the RAF in January 1940, following his 19th birthday. He was called up that spring, sent on an aero engineering course and qualified as a Flight Mechanic – Engine. He joined 605 Squadron at RAF Croydon and was soon repairing Hurricanes in the hectic world of an RAF station during the Battle of Britain. Jeff talks to Air Mail about his experiences.



How much training did you get?

Training was a crash course at RAF St Athan Technical Training College in South Wales. It lasted 13 weeks and was all theoretical for engine mechanics and practical for riggers. Experience was to be gained on squadrons. Those I was with were all conscripted between the ages of 20 and 40 and I was a 19-year-old volunteer.

What was it like when you arrived at 605 Squadron?

I was posted to No. 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Fighter Squadron at the end of September, 1940, which was based at London Airport in Croydon. The airport had suffered severely from recent bombings. As such, we were housed in bungalows in St Matthew's Drive, Wallington, from which the residents had been evacuated. The aircraft were based in a field behind the bungalows.

The squadron was there on its own and didn't have the backup which would normally be available at an RAF aerodrome. It had 12 Hurricanes and 12 pilots. There were two tents in the field, one where pilots gathered waiting for the order to scramble, and one for ground crew. It was here we'd sign forms to verify the servicing work we'd carried out.

The squadron was heavily engaged in the Battle of Britain and was flying five sorties a day. The squadron was very successful and at least one pilot was an ace before I arrived, as he had shot down five aircraft. That said, we were losing pilots and aircraft, and often had to fly undermanned until replacements came in.

What was an average day, for you?

Each day was very much the same. Up at dawn checking over the aircraft and helping the pilots to get airborne, from then on it was receiving the aircraft as they returned in ones and twos; a rush to get them repaired, refuelled, rearmed and back in the air. We worked in two shifts, mornings and afternoons, dawn to dusk.

There was a ground crew of two people with each aircraft, a Flight Mechanic-Engine and a Flight Mechanic-Airframe, whom the pilot relied upon a great deal, particularly in helping him to taxi down the rough ground of the field and through a gap in the fence onto the main airport for take-off. There were different states of readiness: 'immediate', where the pilot would sit in the aircraft with the engine running; 'stand down', where pilots sat around the tent awaiting a telephone call to scramble – during which time I would be sitting in cockpit keeping the engine warm; and 'timed stand down', usually of half an hour.

Above: Croydon airfield, from the Air Ministry's 'The Air Pilot' publication (3rd ed). Key: 1 pilots' tent; 2 ground staff tent; 3 gap in the hedge; 4 country club, also the officers' and senior NCOs' mess; 5 (whole block) other ranks and NCOs' quarters; 6 cook house; 7 (whole block) officers' and senior NCOs' quarters and offices. © Crown

What kind of repairs and maintenance did the aircraft require?

Aircraft were often returning with their airframe covered in bullet holes – as they were made of wood and covered with canvas. The ground crew had the job of cutting a piece of canvas to cover the damage and had two tins of quick drying synthetic camouflage paint, which was used to attach the canvas to the aircraft. There was only one petrol tanker and oil bowser, so it was quite a rush to get the aircraft serviced in time for the next take off. Often the aircraft took off while the paint was still drying, and it was also common to see an airman stretched out across the tail plane helping to keep the rear wheel down on the ground.

As all our Hurricanes were new we didn't have to do routine servicing, and major work was done at our parent aerodrome at Kenley. Of the twelve Hurricanes that started at the beginning of September 1940 only one survived, R4118 UP-W, though it was badly damaged. I worked on UP-W until the end of October 1940, when it left for major servicing.

What were the people you served with like?

All personnel were first class to work with. On arrival I was told that there were no formalities, we all had a job to do and that was to work together to defeat the enemy. Going by the results our pilots were having, we all believed we could achieve that. The auxiliaries were well trained and were very proud of their squadron, and had a special dispensation that they were allowed to wear the county badge of a bear and a ragged staff in the lapel of their uniforms. Both pilots and ground crew were constantly changing, so from one day to the next you had no idea who you would be working with. This also allowed us to share learning and experiences.

Of the pilots, I especially remember Flight Lieutenant Christopher 'Bunny' Carrant, Pilot Officer Robert 'Bob' Foster, Sergeant Eric Wright, Flight Lieutenant Alec Ingle, Pilot Officer Peter Thompson and Flying Officer Derek Forde.

UP-W is the Hurricane I remember most, and Thompson, Forde and Foster all flew it. Forde was the last one to fly it, as I remember he came back with part of a wing missing!

Our relationship with the pilots during the Battle of Britain was different to at other times. Because of the urgency and losses we often didn't know who would be flying our aircraft until he was running towards us. He might be a Pilot Officer the first time, a Flight Lieutenant the next, then get promoted and moved to another squadron and be replaced by a recruit direct from training. It was normal for the next senior to move up a rank, so in practice we had little chance to meet up until the battle was over.

How did you relax?

To help raise the morale of residents at night time, we were encouraged to go into the town of Wallington and join them in the air raid shelters.

On my first visit with a colleague we came across two schoolgirls – just as we heard aircraft approaching. We all sheltered behind a brick wall and fortunately the bombs dropped a little distance away.

My friend escorted one of the girls back to her home, and I escorted the other. Her mother was so pleased that her daughter was safe she invited me in for tea. I stayed with them that evening in their Anderson shelter, leaving in time to be back for the dawn patrol. This became a regular fixture until the end of October when the air raids lessened and we abandoned the shelter for the house.

We were soon joined by family members and neighbours, and would play party games. As I was the only airman, I received a lot of attention. It was my first time away from home and I enjoyed their company. They were all exceptionally friendly and I think that, having finally gained some freedom after living so long in shelters, they were making the most of it. I kept in touch with them and visited after the war.

When it was time for the squadron to leave, the local residents were very upset. They felt safer having us there during all the bombing, and used to count the aircraft taking off and returning – hoping for the pilots' safety.

The squadron put on a going-away party in the airport's country club and invited the locals. So much emotion was expressed that day, one would have thought that the war had finished.

This image: Jeff worked on Hurricane UP-W during the Battle of Britain. Restored in 2003, it is the only Hurricane from the Battle of Britain still airworthy today. © Darren Harbar Photography.
Above: AC2 under training Jeff Brereton, August 1940. © Jeff Brereton

2020 The life of a Typhoon Engineer

Senior Aircraftman Technician **Dave Southern** is an engineer at RAF Coningsby. After training on jets, helicopters and large transport aircraft he worked on C-17 Globemasters. Now with the newly-formed 12 Squadron, he's responsible for making sure the Typhoons are safe and ready to fly, completes Quick Reaction Alert duties and, as part of the first RAF squadron formed with another nation since the Battle of Britain, is expecting to start working alongside Qatari colleagues this year.



Above: "The average day starts early". Top right: Red tag items. Working through the safety critical checklist of 'remove before flight' components to prepare a Typhoon for take off. Bottom right: Completing major and minor maintenance of the Typhoon. © MOD/Crown 2020.



Above: In December 2019, 12 Squadron took part in Exercise Epic Skies III which the RAF and the Qatar Emiri Air Force concluded with a flypast over Doha to celebrate Qatar National Day. Here Qatar EAF Rafale aircraft release flares to celebrate. Right: Engineers and their ground equipment on the flight line for a Typhoon sortie. © MOD/Crown 2019



How much training did you get? What kind of people trained alongside you?

I joined the RAF at 23 for the skills, discipline and qualifications that I would gain through their apprenticeship programme. I attended RAF Halton for my basic training for nine weeks and then moved on to the Defence College for Aeronautical Engineering at RAF Cosford for my mechanical technician trade training. There was a six-month course on the basic principles of aircraft design, ground handling, repair and most importantly how the RAF engineers operated their various fighter jets, helicopters and large transport aircraft.

After graduation I was lucky enough to get my first choice of posting. I was posted to 99 Squadron at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire which operates the C-17 Globemaster III. I stayed there for just short of two years, all the while working alongside technicians to complete my aeronautical engineering apprenticeship and gaining valuable engineering experience. During my time at 99 Squadron I flew with the aircraft, as part of the crew, to Afghanistan, Turkey, Qatar, UAE, Canada and the USA.

I returned to RAF Cosford for my final phase of training, lasting one year. Thankfully I could call upon the extremely valuable engineering experience that I had gained at 99 Squadron to assist me in completing my training

What was it like when you arrived at 12 Squadron?

After I had left RAF Cosford for the second time, I was posted to the Depth Engineering hangar at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire. Here I worked alongside BAE Systems engineers to strip down and complete major and minor maintenance of the Typhoon.

When 12 Squadron stood-up they only required a small workforce of experienced technicians to ensure the first six months of flying ran safely and smoothly. To begin with we worked alongside 29 Squadron. Once we had been allocated our first few Typhoons, we were able to start operating independently.

What is an average day for you?

The average day starts early. We service the aircraft in the hangar, tow them and their ground equipment out to the flight line and finally check that they are safe and ready to fly on the morning sortie. We then assist the pilot with their start up and departure routine, all the while fixing any faults that may arise.

Only when they have taken off can we finally put the kettle on. But not for long. We have to be ready for their recovery, marshal them back in, fuel and service them once more in preparation for their second sortie. We see them off, see them in and service them once more before fixing any faults and towing them and their equipment back into the hangar for the night. Ready for the repeat the next day.

How do engineers contribute to Quick Reaction Alert?

The QRA duty is carried out from a purpose-built facility at Coningsby. Engineers from all of Coningsby's Typhoon squadrons take it in turns to work in week long shifts where we live and work close to the aircraft and each other. Any engineer who has taken part in QRA completes a specific training package and should already have a good deal of normal flight-line experience with the Typhoon aircraft. When the bell goes you fall back on your training and work together to get the job done as quickly and safely as possible. Given the numerous possible threats

to the UK and nations that repeatedly test our responses we all know that when you are participating in QRA it's all for a good reason and you don't mind, too much that you are working away from your family.

What kinds of repairs and maintenance does the Typhoon need?

I was once part of a team whose job it was to assess the damage to a Typhoon after it had been struck by lightning. 70% of the exterior of the Typhoon is made up of composite materials which, while they make the aircraft very light, don't respond well to high voltage lightning strikes. Luckily there is lightning protection built into the whole aircraft which passes the energy safely away from key areas and out to the nearest safe place. In this instance it had struck the nose cone, travelled through the transparent canopy, along the spine and then exited out of the rudder and the fin. Walking along the top of the aircraft you could follow the path it had taken. Luckily, we were able to replace all affected components, test and return the aircraft to service.

The closest parallel I have with the engineers repairing battle damage during the Battle of Britain was being part of a small team who were sent to repair an aircraft that had suffered undercarriage problems in Bermuda while on its way to the west coast of America. We had brought the necessary replacement parts and tools but encountered issues removing the faulty component. Luckily, we were able to utilise the tools and facilities of the local airport to get the aircraft serviceable just in time for the arrival of a RAF Voyager aircraft. This Airbus A330 aircraft then refuelled the Typhoon while on its way to Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada for Exercise Red Flag.

How does it feel to be part of 12 Squadron?

We are all working with the most up-to-date version of the Typhoon and operating in a purpose-built squadron building. Most engineers on 12 Squadron have never been part of a newly formed flying squadron before, but we are all enjoying the new challenges it brings.

The first group of our Qatari colleagues will be arriving in the next few weeks and we're looking forward to it. We have already met some of them during our recent exercise to Qatar, Exercise Epic Skies III, where our pilots took part in their flying exercises and participated in their national day flypast celebrations.

How do you relax after a tough shift?

We are looked after well on exercises and operations. Communication home, sports, good food, day trips away from work and good camaraderie are important to everyone while they are away on exercises, and the latter is something the people on 12 Squadron have in abundance.

At Coningsby, well, I am lucky enough to have my wife and daughter close by. After a tough shift it's good to come home to them and the dog, and a pint.

What do you hope to do in future?

I hope to have a long career with the RAF and when that has finished start a new one in civilian engineering, perhaps within the aviation sector. But in the meantime, I intend to take advantage of the extensive range of what's on offer to someone in the RAF.

"The sky was full of dogfighting aircraft"

The Battle of Britain through children's eyes

To mark the 80th anniversary of the start of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, we asked RAF Association members to send in their memories of that momentous summer. From dogfights in the sky, to sheltering from the raining bombs, this is the battle as seen through the eyes of those readers who were children at the time.

Children out playing in the summer of 1940 understandably found it difficult to appreciate the dangers of the months ahead. "Apart from the disruption caused by evacuees – which was all good fun – the end of 1939 and beginning of 1940 went by without us really knowing the war was on", remembers Ray Duley, then aged 11.

The idea that aircraft would soon be fighting deadly battles overhead was too abstract, and the thought that bombs could intrude upon the small worlds of their childhood was so alien a concept as to be almost meaningless. For the children who lived through that summer, the first feeling when they saw aircraft crowding the skies above was often one of youthful excitement.

Eight-year-old Eric Parrish remembers spending day after day in his garden in Ilford, east London, with eyes upturned: "The aircraft vapour trails, the puffs of bursting anti-aircraft shells, and the sight and sound of Spitfires and Hurricanes going into the German aircraft was exhilarating", he says. "Every time we saw a parachute open



The 'lucky' enamel RAF brooch Ian Mein discovered in his garden in the summer of 1940. ©Ian Mein
Right: The burned-out German incendiary bomb collected by William White, and still in his possession today. ©William White

everyone cheered".

Joan Farmer, an Air Raid Warden at only 17, was impressed with the speed at which the sky could fill with aircraft. One day in Deptford, the siren suddenly rang out: "Within minutes the sky above was full of dogfighting aircraft", she says. "Our Spitfires were unbelievable as they swooped around the German planes. It was an unforgettable sight."

William White, 12, was similarly impressed: "Spitfires and Hurricanes always attracted our attention, and fighter pilots of

course replaced train drivers as the objects of hero worship."

In Elham, Kent, a low-flying Messerschmitt Bf 109 appeared above five-year-old John Palmer one October morning, hotly pursued by an RAF fighter. "Suddenly, right above my head there was an enormous explosion" recalls John. "Pieces of aircraft fell all around. The engine came down on the cricket ground and the fuselage landed about 400 yards from where I was standing". John remembers his father rushing to the scene before returning, "filled with sadness". The young pilot, Oberleutnant Ludwig Lenz had still been alive in the wreckage, but died very shortly afterwards. "Underneath his tattered flying suit he'd been wearing tennis clothes and shoes" John recalls, "obviously hoping for a game when he returned to base."

Close to the Thames Estuary in Essex, John Snoxall was watching the dogfights with his grandfather and brother late one summer afternoon.

"Granddad was standing by a large water butt in the garden, watching the sky" John remembers. "A spent bullet rattled down the roof tiles, hit his tin hat and plopped into the water butt. He looked up, shook his fist, told my brother and I to get to the Anderson shelter and shouted to the sky: 'You'll have to do better than that to knock me off!'"

As the battle progressed, many youngsters began looking to the ground as much as the sky, hoping to be the first to salvage a spent bullet casing or piece of German aircraft. "As a boy of that age I did what all boys seemed to do", says William White. "I set aside a substantial box marked 'Relics', which was quickly filled with shrapnel, used and unused bullets and cartridge cases, a bottle of aviation fuel siphoned from a Me 110 together with a machine gun bullet tray, and a half burnt incendiary bomb; much-prized for its swap value."

Not all 'relics' took the form of shrapnel →



Hop pickers' children from London shelter in a slit trench while watching a dog fight overhead. Summer 1940. ©TopFoto, colourised by 'Piece of Jake'.

The wreckage of Messerschmitt Bf 109, piloted by Ludwig Lenz, which John Palmer saw shot down over Elham on 15 October 1940. Public domain



and bullet casings. Ian Mein, then aged 11, discovered an enamel brooch in the shape of a horseshoe laying in his garden in Crowborough in the South Downs. Presumably it came from the cockpit, or pilot, of an RAF aircraft. In the centre of the brooch is a painted RAF crest, surrounded by a horseshoe adorned with four-leaf clovers; evidently a good luck charm.

The increasing dangers of battle could be made more bearable by focusing on these small, everyday pursuits. After enduring a night of "the most frightening noise" from a nearby battery of anti-aircraft guns, nine-year-old Geoffrey Moth remembers being consoled by the thought of all the shrapnel he could collect next morning on his way to school.

A change in routine

School was another part of life affected since the beginning of the battle, more so when the Luftwaffe changed tactics. Initially it had fought to gain air superiority against the RAF, but this focus shifted to targeting airfields and infrastructure, before the bombing of cities themselves.

"When the sirens sounded, we left the classroom and filed

out to the shelters" says Brian Foster, a schoolboy in Sussex at the time. "If nothing happened the teachers might wander off, and those of us nearest the entrance would creep out to see what was going on. We often saw small planes weaving about - presumably engaged in dog fights."

In Welwyn, Hertfordshire, Ray Duley was kept busy by his deputy headmaster when aircraft would appear overhead. "Knowing I was a keen aircraft spotter", recalls Ray, "Mr Wesley would ask me to go with him onto the school's roof. Only if we recognised German aircraft would he send the pupils to the shelter."

The nightly raids saw regular patterns of sleep become a thing of the past. When six-year-old Keith Carley arrived at school in Isleworth, he and his class would often be put back to bed - on mattresses out in the fresh air - to catch up on their missing sleep.

What time children were expected at school the next morning could depend upon what time the 'all-clear' had sounded the previous night. Five-year-old Trevor Todd and his sister would sit under a solid

"Our Spitfires were unbelievable as they swooped around the German planes"

was an ARP Warden and my mother ran the shop" explains Ian. "There just wasn't time for them to keep tabs on my brother and I every minute of the day."

kitchen table playing with their toys during an air raid, but Trevor always had one eye on the clock. "If the all-clear sounded before midnight, we had to go to school at the normal time the following morning", he recalls. "And if the all-clear sounded after 1am we started school at 10am. However, if the all-clear sounded after 3am we had the following morning off! I am afraid that as a young boy, this seemed more important to me at the time."

Children were quick to acclimatise to the ever-changing situation. Five-year-old Ian Waller remembers playing in bombed-out houses, and lighting fires to bake potatoes in a crater behind his house in Hornchurch. The combination of working or absent parents and a lack of schooling in areas under attack also resulted in reduced supervision. "My dad

the all-clear we found a crater 12 feet deep in front of our shop". The cigarette machine had been blown clear across the street and parade opposite, only coming to rest after hitting another building. The windows had also been blown out, and stayed that way until 1945.

Naturally, some children still found sheltering from the bombs a great game. Geoffrey Moth remembers the feeling of entering his Anderson shelter: "It seemed to be a great adventure to go into the shelter on hearing the air raid sirens" he says. "The fact that we were just below ground level muffled the sound of bombs exploding, although we learnt to gauge the size and place of nearby explosions as time went on." Geoffrey had plenty of time to hone these skills. Living in south-east London, he spent 57 nights in the shelter during the early part of the Blitz.

Not every child warmed to life in the Anderson shelter however. Bill Hatherley, then a five-year-old watching German bombers stream overhead on their way to the nearby dockyards, says: "I couldn't cope with being closed up in the shelter, so I used to stand in the sand-bagged area outside watching the bombers fly towards the city [as they were] caught in searchlights from the defences nearby."

John Snoxall also remembers the times spent in an Anderson shelter made by his grandfather. "It had a stout brick wall and earth bank protecting the entrance which faced into allotments at the bottom of the garden", he says. "Once, we were all inside the shelter - except

granddad, who was standing between the entrance and the blast wall - when a bomb landed in the allotments. Granddad ducked just in time to avoid a very large cabbage that landed alongside him." Naturally, John ventured onto the allotments with a wheelbarrow the next day to collect items for his box of relics.

No longer a game

The indiscriminate nature of aerial bombardment could impose radical changes on everyday life in a single moment. On 15 September, the block of flats in which four-year-old Derek Smith lived in London received a direct hit from a 500lb bomb. "It destroyed our flat except for the front room bedroom in which my mother, brother and I were

sleeping", recalls Derek, and "the kitchen at the back of the flat where my father was - having just returned from Fire Brigade duty". This was indeed a lucky escape, though not for the whole family: "Sadly my grandmother was killed in another bedroom", continues Derek, "where my brother and I would normally have been sleeping."

Joan Farmer, the young Air Raid Warden also enjoyed more than one lucky escape. While in charge of a shelter in the gardens of Peckham Library, an unexploded bomb landed so close it showered her with dirt. Another escape came when she was on patrol. "Through the darkness I heard a swooshing noise", she remembers. "Looking up I saw a parachute mine appear over the roof of a house to my right. It

floated over my head, across the road, over the roof to my left and exploded in the gardens behind".

On the same day that Derek Smith's home was bombed, 10-year-old Ron McGill from Vauxhall, London, experienced what he would later describe as "the most vivid moment of my young life." Late that morning, while visiting relatives near Kennington Park, sirens began to sound. Ron picks up the story as he and his mother were running home amid the drone of aircraft engines and bursts of anti-aircraft fire:

"Suddenly, to our astonishment, we realised a German parachute was coming down on us. The parachutist skimmed The Oval cricket ground wall and landed by the doorway of a community centre. This centre was packed



Above: Keith Carley and classmates catch up on sleep at Marlborough Infants School, Isleworth, during the battle. ©Keith Carley

The remains of Robert Zehbe's Dornier plummets towards Victoria Station. ©Chris Goss





Above: Bomb damage to Derek Smith's flats. Derek was carried out of the first-floor window over the shoulder of a fireman. ©Derek Smith

London's dock area during the 7 September 1940 air raid on London. Tower Bridge stands out against a background of smoke and flames. ©US Information Agency

with survivors of the previous Saturday's bombing, and a crowd rushed out with as many weapons as they could grab. 'We want nothing to do with this!' said my mother as she dragged me away."

The German airman, Robert Zehbe, later died of his wounds. Whether these were received when his aircraft was shot down or were inflicted by the crowd, is unknown.

A similar scene almost unfolded in front of 10-year-old Dennis Evans, who would later capture the moment the crowd arrived at the crash site in his poem 'Low Flying Aircraft':

*Breathless, we survey the
enemy aircraft:
iron-black, swastikad.
Blood lust
Poised...
Police Constable Ridge faces
the crowd,
cycle-clipped trousers on wide
apart legs.
Flushed from the chase, he roars
out his sanity.
Saves fearful man
from pitchforks.*

Looking back

Despite the dangers and hardship, many children who experienced the Battle of Britain and the subsequent Blitz remember it as a time of genuine excitement. "I am so delighted that I was able to live through those times; they are still a vivid memory" says Eric Parrish.

"I am so
delighted that
I was able to live
through those
times"

Sydney Smith remembers being so impressed "that brave young men were risking their lives for my future that at that young age I determined to do something for the Royal Air Force." Sydney would later do just that – serving four years with Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service. Indeed, the majority of those quoted in this article would go on to join the RAF.

While the rest of the war was still ahead of them, the dangers of 1940 had at least been endured. William White would later be caught beneath two disintegrating RAF aircraft after a mid-air collision, and Derek Smith would again be bombed-out of his home when a V1 rocket blew out his windows in July 1944.

Fittingly, the scenes of devastation in 1940 would also play a part in scenes of celebration five years later. "After repairs to our new flat, we finally returned home," Derek recalls, "and enjoyed celebrating both VE and VJ days with massive bonfires on our old bombsites." AM

Thank you to everyone who sent in their memories, all of which we enjoyed reading. Our apologies to those who were not featured: this was solely due to restrictions of space.

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Daring Diana

Part 1

To mark the 75th anniversary of VJ Day on 15 August, aviation historian and co-author of *RAF Liberators over Burma*, **Matt Poole**, relates the fascinating detective story which revealed the fate of his mother's first husband, Sergeant George Plank, whose Liberator was lost over Rangoon, Burma in 1944.

In late 1940, my mother Jessie stepped off a Liverpool bus to the shrieking of an air raid siren. Taking refuge in a nearby shelter, she was joined by two young Liverpool lads also seeking safety, one of whom was George Plank. It was a fortuitous encounter. Jessie and George soon began dating — often meeting at the air raid shelter before heading to the movies. In December 1941 George entered the RAF, where he trained as a wireless operator/air gunner, and was eventually posted to RAF Harwell.

Despite the wartime restrictions, the pair set a wedding date: 17 July 1943. When George learned the night before that all leave had been cancelled, Jessie's father made a hasty call to Harwell. An exception was finally made, and George arrived in Liverpool at 2am, only nine hours before the wedding. After the ceremony and reception, the newlyweds stayed overnight in Liverpool, but George had to return to Harwell early the next morning.

Before departing abroad for India just over six weeks later — he was not permitted to tell Jessie his destination — George promised her that he would come home from the war. However, on the night of 29 February 1944, with his bomber held fast in searchlights over Rangoon, George found that this was the one promise he could not keep.

With no remains located, after the war George's name was engraved on the memorial to the missing at Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore. In 1949, more than five years after George's disappearance, Jessie remarried and settled in the USA with her new husband — my father, an American.

The search

As a boy raised in the USA, I was aware of the scant details provided to my mother by the authorities: George's aircraft, a B-24 Liberator from 159 Squadron, went down over the target with no parachutes spotted. He was missing, with particulars unknown.

Compelled to learn more, and with my parents' blessing, in 1990 I began to investigate this mysterious man from my mother's past, and the wartime tragedy which, twelve years before my birth, changed the course of her life.

I began with an enquiry to the Air Historical Branch (AHB). Little did I know that their response would propel me into years of dogged investigation.

"How can mere words tell of Death's closeness, of the fragile thread, between a voice — and silence?"

Poem found at the bedside of Pilot Officer Michael Davis, 159 Squadron. Killed aboard Daring Diana, aged 19.

George's Liberator, named 'Daring Diana', and a second 159 Squadron bomber named 'Pegasus' had been lost while attacking Mahlwagon Rail Yards in Rangoon, Burma on 29 February 1944. In addition to all nine men aboard Daring Diana, three airmen from Pegasus were also reported missing, while the six other Pegasus crewmen were captured by the Japanese. The AHB had also supplied me with the names of all eighteen airmen involved.

While this correspondence greatly added to the bare facts I'd been working from, I longed to know what else I might be able to uncover about what happened to George on that tragic night and afterwards. I pursued a variety of leads via letters and telephone



Strike photo taken from a 159 Squadron Liberator on 5 - 6 February 1944. Bombs can be seen exploding across the runway of Burma's Heho Aerodrome below the centre of the image. George Plank also flew on this sortie.

calls (all pre-internet, for me, until 1997) and ran into my share of brick walls, but I approached each correspondence as if it could be a potential gold mine.

One helpful contact the AHB had provided was the 159 Squadron Association. Its members were invaluable in linking me to men who were on the squadron when George was, and even some who flew on George's last mission — such as ex-PoW Don Lomas, then the last-surviving Pegasus airman. I visited Don in the UK on three occasions, and from him I gained an invaluable eyewitness account of what happened that night:

"The searchlight caught us on the run into the target, and continued to hold us after the bombs were released... There was... a jerk soon after bombing. Looking out of the window I remember something flashing past, and thought, 'What the devil's that? Christ, that's tracer, from the fighter!... it must have caught [the pilot] Stanley... Straightaway we started going down, on fire. Just so quick. Seconds."

Don remembered that after managing to bale out, he looked back at his aircraft as he descended beneath the parachute's canopy: "It was really on fire then," he said, "this ball of fire disappearing way down there somewhere, and it was our plane. P for Pegasus going down." Don's account had also provided the first definitive proof that enemy fighters had

been on the scene that fateful night. If Pegasus had been shot down by a fighter, had the same fate befallen Daring Diana?

Another veteran I managed to contact through the 159 Squadron Association, Bill Kirkness DFM, also suggested that fighters had been present. Although he'd flown on the same mission, he was too busy to see either Pegasus or Daring Diana. However, in a letter to me Bill said: "We had just begun our homeward leg when Fred, in the tail, announced quietly, 'Rear gunner to crew. Someone's bought it. I can see an aircraft going down in flames, to starboard.' Few words were spoken in reply, but all hoped it was one of the enemy fighters."



George and Jessie Plank on their wedding day.



BZ980 'Goofy'. This B-24 Liberator of 159 Squadron was identical to Daring Diana. All images © Matt Poole unless otherwise stated.

Breakthrough

One thing I learned during my research was that breakthroughs often come out of the blue. While visiting a friend who collected World War Two memorabilia, I was asked if I'd be interested in purchasing any old books prior to his move to Florida. "Do you have anything on the air war over Burma - from the Japanese perspective?" I asked. "Yes, I think I have," came his unexpected reply. He then located a partial English translation of *Nihon Rikugun Sentokitai* - a study of Japanese Army Air Force fighter aces from World War Two, printed only in Japan.

That night, awake with insomnia, I perused the typewritten pages. While reading the biography of Warrant Officer Bunichi Yamaguchi, a key date struck me:

"Fought over Burma with the 204th Sentai... Shared two B-24s destroyed... on Feb 29/30 /1944 with Lt. H. Takiguchi..."

I quickly turned the pages to find the entry for Lieutenant. H. Takiguchi:

"Fought over Burma... shared with WO Yamaguchi two B-24s destroyed on Feb 29/30 /1944"

This discovery was no remedy for insomnia. My prior research had shown that Daring Diana and Pegasus were the only RAF B-24s lost over Burma between 25 February and 2 March. Now I'd stumbled across evidence that both bombers had been downed by fighters. What's more, I had

The war in the Far East

In December 1941, Japan attacked British territories in Hong Kong, Malaya (now Malaysia), Singapore and Burma (now Myanmar). From then until August 1945, British Commonwealth troops and their allies fought a bitter war against the Japanese in Asia.

The air war in the Far East was unique in the history of the RAF. It occurred much further away from home than any other major campaign it had ever been involved in. Much of it also took place over mountain and jungle terrain, and in often extreme weather. Few of the aids to navigation used in Europe were available, maps were unreliable and the distances involved were enormous by the standards of the day.

The RAF's 159 Squadron, flying B-24 Liberators, began operations against Japanese targets from India in November 1942. From then on, the squadron flew bombing, anti-shipping, mine-laying, flare dropping, photo reconnaissance, air-sea rescue, enemy radar investigation and supply missions over Burma, Siam, Malaya, French Indo-China, Cambodia and Northern Sumatra.



the names of the Japanese pilots themselves. The book said that Takiguchi had died in the war, but was Yamaguchi still alive? If so, could I somehow find him?

Using my growing list of contacts, I was eventually pointed in the direction of General Yuzuru Kochiyama, a wartime pilot turned Japanese aviation historian. I quickly composed a letter to General Kochiyama, hoping that he could help find Bunichi Yamaguchi, or at least news of his death.

In October 1991, I received his reply. Not only did he provide Mr Yamaguchi's address, but he also wrote, in imperfect but understandable English, that he would soon meet with Mr Yamaguchi to discuss my research.

With an address in my hands, I penned a detailed letter to

Mr Yamaguchi, the man who had sealed George's fate and widowed my mother. In all my correspondences I shared information freely, feeling this increased my chances of receiving meaningful material in return. Now came a key test of that philosophy. I crossed my fingers and waited patiently through the long holiday season when the international mail would be slow. Finally, on 24 January 1992, I received a reply.

Contact

Not unexpectedly, it was in Japanese. Fortunately, a noted Japanese language expert whom I'd seen on TV lived nearby. When I phoned and explained my situation, he wholeheartedly wanted in, asking for nothing except a coffee while he translated the letter. The correspondence was a richly detailed response in which Mr Yamaguchi recounted the aerial combat of 29 February 1944. More poignantly, however, it also included a heartfelt apology to my mother:

"I realize your mother's husband lost his life by virtue of our bullets. From the bottom of my heart I offer my humble apologies and condolences for his death in action... Your mother

has been suffering for a long time. Be sure to show her this letter, which may not be worth anything, but perhaps it will be of some consolation. Please tell her that I would like to feel that she will be able to spend the rest of her days on earth in a happier manner."

These few words meant the world to my mother. Unlike some of her generation, she harboured no bitterness against the Japanese, or against Mr Yamaguchi; "He was only performing his duty," she said. Yet unknown to me, she had been suffering nightmares and grieving George's death, really for the first time in her life, due to my tenacious snooping. After reading Mr Yamaguchi's eloquent words, however, the nightmares ended. From that moment, and for the rest of her life, she beamed with pride for George, despite his sacrifice. My mother Jessie passed away, at peace with her past, in June 2015.

Matt Poole continues the story in October's issue of Air Mail, where his efforts to find out what happened to George and his crew uncover more remarkable eyewitness accounts, and lead to an unexpected discovery in Rangoon itself.

Author Bio: Matt Poole is an aviation historian with a particular interest in 159 Squadron. His research into the fates of George Plank and his comrades aboard Daring Diana and Pegasus resulted in a service of remembrance at St Clement Danes in 1998, attended by 120 kin, friends and comrades of the fallen. His mother Jessie was one guest of honour, and another was Don Lomas, the last surviving airman of the two crews shot down on 29 February 1944.



Left: Bunichi Yamaguchi poses in front of a fighter, date unknown. © H. Sakaida
Below: Bunichi Yamaguchi's letter to Matt Poole.

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Adapt and overcome

The start-stop revival of Nottingham Branch

It was a chance meeting at a football club that set the ball rolling. Four former WRAFs were at a Nottingham Forest FC community day in summer 2019 when they were spotted by Association Station Officer Geoff Burton. He was looking for likely folk to help revitalise Nottingham Branch and managed to sign up Linda Philpot and her friends for the job. They were later joined by Marion Wells, who arrived after five years at Erewash Branch in Derbyshire.

Nottingham Branch has a proud history. Set up in 1937, it had survived and thrived for more than seven decades. But as members had aged and passed on it began to decline. Eventually its only vital sign was the indomitable 'seventy something' year-old Mary Bell who continued fundraising and organising Battle of Britain parades using her powerful mind, her telephone and her letter writing skills. In 2017/18 the branch became dormant.

It took the new group from summer 2019 to February 2020 to gather all the branch records, assess fundraising stock, check membership records and find a place to meet – currently the back room of the Vat and Fiddle pub, close to Nottingham's railway station. Before, and at the AGM in February 2020, there were frank discussions about the skills needed to run the branch and how much time people could commit.

Marion Wells, the new chairman, says, "It's important that everyone can contribute and has an appropriate job at



"We will adapt and overcome. And then we will crack on."

the branch. With modern charity, finance, governance and legal requirements you need the right skills, time and energy to create an effective committee. Our trustees are ready to take this branch forward positively, having fun and raising more money for the Association."

"We had never considered being a virtual branch," says Marion. "Nothing beats rocking up, having a pint and shooting the breeze. For me it's got to be about getting us out of our houses, and meeting people – you can pick up on the nuances that you don't get over email or even the phone.

"In Nottingham we'd love to have a venue for RAF (or tri-service) support; a one-stop-shop for veterans or even parents of serving people. We'd provide a friendly ear, a game of draughts and help with any problems they talk about. It all depends on the funding available.

"We arranged a trip to RAF Scampton last October and were moving on with the committee structure and places to meet," Marion says. "By this year, our honorary welfare officer was in place and about to be trained. We were just beginning to get feelers out, and be known for doing something. But then the COVID-19 restrictions came into force and everything had to stop.

"We joined the Association's Op CONNECT, of course, and have been phoning round our members and doing the bag drops. When we call, everyone is really grateful that someone has been in touch and checked on them. This has created new contacts and brought people back into the RAF family.



Top: The revitalised branch's first trip to RAF Scampton in late 2019. © Marion Wells.

Above: 'The original four', shortly after they were approached by Geoff Burton at Nottingham Forest FC, (L-R: Linda Philpot, Jillian Vamplew, Maggie Cassidy, Jan Olding). "We then approached the other WRAFs for support and they helped us to get started." © Linda Philpot

Right: Marion Wells, current chairman, helping out at a fundraising stall. © Marion Wells

Far right: The original committee members meeting at the Vat and Fiddle. L-R Sam Hatley, Linda Philpot, Madeline Tysoe, Jan Olding, Maggie Cassidy, Mandy Foster-Wright and Jillian Vamplew. (Jeanette Newton, not pictured, was also on the committee). © Linda Philpot



"We also discovered five members who hadn't given us any phone numbers. So we got out our pens and paper and wrote letters to them instead. One phoned us back within 45 minutes of his post arriving. Another texted us; that keeping in touch is so important.

"We have enough funds to tide us through the coronavirus restrictions," Marion says. "But the training is on hold, supermarket and city centre fundraising is stopped, and meetings are out of the question. But we will adapt and overcome. And then we will crack on with what we need to do."

And Mary Bell? She is involved again, as a newly created Life Vice President, in recognition of her phenomenal contribution. AM

"It's what I can give back!" Linda Philpot, Vice Chair:



"I served from 1976 until 1996. I was a supplier by trade and reached the rank of sergeant. My final posting was the Royal Air Force Schools Presentation Team operating out of RAF Bracknell.

"After leaving the RAF I married a civilian and had two boys, who are now wonderful young men. I started to regain my 'wraffiness' after joining an "ex WRAF" Facebook page. After my marriage ended I couldn't afford to replace a broken rear door which left me vulnerable – and one of the WRAF's suggested I contact the Association. RAFA were an absolute gem for me.

"After I realised that the membership fees were only £23 a year (not a month!), I became a member, and I have felt part of the RAF family again. I have now got an extended network of friends, locally and further afield. I have helped re-open Nottingham Branch. I feel there is a real need for charities like RAFA to support people who served their country. We are a proud bunch and not known for asking for help, but having an approachable friendly organisation beside us is a massive help.

"In my case it's not what the Association can give me, it's what I can give back. The Association was there for me without me having to do anything. The least I can do is give my time to help others. Selfishly, I also get to meet some great people, across all ages, who all have one thing in common: they want to belong to this amazing Association."

Above: Linda Philpot as a new recruit in the late 1970s. © Linda Philpot
Left: One of just 38 copies of The Battle of Britain In Lace, a 4.57m x 1.65m creation made by the world-renowned lace makers of Nottingham to commemorate the Battle of Britain. The panels took two years to design and create and the Jacquard pattern was destroyed after the limited edition was completed. One copy was given to Nottingham Branch and is now cared for by textiles specialists at Nottingham City Council. This identical panel (left) is on permanent display at Bentley Priory Museum where all visitors will be able to see its exquisite details as soon as government restrictions allow. Another copy of the 'priceless artefact' is on display at the Association's Dowding House independent living complex in Scotland. © Bentley Priory Museum

What we've learned:

- Find the right jobs for the right people in your branch and it will work well.
- Try a few venues out. It's hard to find one with the right car parking, public transport, and that's not too noisy.
- Meeting places don't always come cheap. Supermarkets have free community rooms that we could use in the day, but we choose to meet in the evenings. So expect to need time to find the right place.
- Not everyone has internet or email access – so we need to accommodate that.
- Organise some training for your committee of trustees – it's too hard for people with no experience to suddenly try to lead and govern a charity or be a treasurer. Allow them to shadow more experienced trustees. Once trained they will gain skills and experience that they can also take into the rest of their lives and jobs.
- Consider going to the banking ombudsman if you are struggling to get dormant funds from your banks.

Anglesey Branch

In February, RAF Association Liaison Officers Flying Officer James Davis and Warrant Officer Kev Beattie invited the branch to visit RAF Valley where they were hosted by Nos. IV (AC) and XXV(F) Squadrons. Squadron Leader Tom Bould talked about the RAF's modern aviation training, which is a far cry from that used when our members served during their time in the RAF. Several members of the group had served at RAF Valley and were all fascinated with the developments in technology since their time in service. The visit was rounded off with lunch in the Sergeants' Mess.



Belgian Branch

98-year old RAF veteran George Sutherland paid homage to defence personnel past and present on VE Day at Liussenthoek Military Cemetery and, inspired by Colonel Sir Tom Moore, undertook a 2 km sponsored walk. Group Captain Justin Fowler, President of RAFA Belgian Branch and the British Defence Attaché to Belgium and Luxembourg, was invited to meet him on the day. Keeping a safe distance, George explained how much he had enjoyed his time in the RAF. Justin Fowler said 'It was delightful to meet George, he is such a fit and enthusiastic veteran who continues to offer service to others and he is an inspiration to us all.'



City of Bristol Branch

Despite the lockdown restrictions, Anthony Peters, branch chairman, took part in a virtual standard bearers' ceremony to mark ANZAC day.



Cranwell Branch

Since the lockdown, committee members have been monitoring more than 100 mature members of the branch, many sending daily 'humour contributions' and quizzes. Before then, January and February branch meetings were held in the mornings, each followed by lunch in the Warrant Officers and Sergeants' Mess on station. One of the speakers, Air Vice-Marshal Gavin MacKay, rejoined the Association as a Cranwell Branch member. The AGM went well with the chairman highlighting the legal standards required by the Charity Commission - which surprised some of the many members attending. The planned visit to Rothbury and Flowerdown House Hotels had to be postponed.

Formby Branch

At the AGM held at RAF Woodvale in March, Fred Jones retired after 30 years as Branch Secretary. During that time Fred was noted for his excellent administrative and engineering skills. With the help of his wife, Fred raised funds for the branch and for the Wings Appeal. Branch Support Officer Marc Boyle presented Fred with a model spitfire mounted on a clock base in appreciation of all his hard work. In addition, branch members Bob Gilchrist - who joined Formby Branch in 1970 - and Olive Woods, retired due to failing health. Bob and Olive were noted for presenting the weekly dances at the Formby Branch Headquarters.



Fraserburgh Branch

Burns Night was celebrated at the branch on 25 January. The haggis was addressed by Branch President Stanley Green MBE who also gave the grace. The evening was reported in traditional dialect as follows: "Broch in tae the skirl o' the pipes by our excellent piper, ye find him ay a dainty chiel, and foo o' glee, playing, 'Ye Scots wha wish Auld Scotland well'. I trust ye're are my RAFA honest freens, as ye anither Gude Night and joy be with ye a. Auld Lang Syne."



Glasgow Branch

On 11 March, prior to the government's social distancing regulations coming into force, the branch met for lunch at Café India in the Merchant City area of Glasgow. With the closure of the Wings Café in 2019, it was felt that there remains a need to maintain the camaraderie that exists among the patrons of the café after almost three years of meeting together. While welfare is at the absolute heart of what the Association stands for and does, social activities remain the backbone of maintaining a healthy branch.



Leek Branch

In late February, Leek Branch members and friends enjoyed a great day out at the Airbus factory at Broughton near Chester.



Leigh Branch

The branch is asking all its members to check their contact details are up to date so the new chairman can keep in touch. Members can see their details on the Members' Portal or call 0800 018 2361. The chairman can be contacted by email at rafaleighbranch@gmail.com or on the branch's new Facebook page. During the COVID-19 crisis, the branch has focused on its more vulnerable members. Next there will be a fresh approach to face-to-face gatherings, involving liaising with local veterans' services and air cadets. It's an exciting time to be a member of Leigh Branch, so please get in touch.

Mablethorpe and Sutton-on-Sea Branch

At the branch's AGM, President Sheila Sawyer presented a certificate from the Association to Annamae Marman. This was in recognition of the care and support she provides for her father, Phil, who was disabled some years ago in an accident, and formerly provided to her late mother - both branch members. Annamae (pictured very top, right, with Shiela Sawyer and her father Phil) regularly attends branch meetings.



Market Harborough Branch

The branch raised £88 for the Wings Appeal by selling RAF Association Lightning lapel badges at the Fast Taxi, Reheat demonstration by Lightning Aircraft at Bruntingthorpe Airfield in February.

Mid Sussex Branch

Peter Stenning, committee member at the Mid Sussex Branch celebrated VE Day with a display in his windows and garden. The former RAF medic, who served with 107MU in Egypt, was also featured in the Mid Sussex Times after vocally supporting the NHS nurses and carers.



Moray Branch

March's AGM saw Chairman Marty Latham-Scott and his wife Pam, Secretary, stand down; we thank them most heartedly for their sterling work over the past many years, the branch would not have lasted without them. Treasurer David Greatorex, a RAFA member for nearly 60 years, steps down after being treasurer for more than 30 years at Lossiemouth/Moray. We cannot thank him enough for loyally keeping us financially straight for so long. He remains as deputy treasurer and Tony Broadhurst takes over as treasurer. New member, Veron Young, becomes secretary. Bill Stuart takes on the challenging Wings Co-ordinator post. We wish all branches good wishes and stay safe during these difficult times.

Newcastle and Gateshead Branch

Standard Bearer Dave Gilbert and other branch members formed an honour guard at the funeral in Amble of former WAAF Edith Hunter, who died in March at the age of 98. Edith served as a plotter during World War Two and, in later life, was an enthusiastic member of the WAAF Association. *[The funeral took place before lockdown].*



©Alan Proudlock

Potter Heigham Branch

On 16 March, the last day before we went into lockdown, a group of members visited the Remote Radar Head at Trimmingham during a maintenance period. Thanks to SAC Peter Van Houten and the on-shift workers for showing us round the 'Golf ball'. On Friday 8 May, Mick De'Ath, Branch Standard Bearer, held a 'mini VE 75 parade' in his front garden for members who lived within walking distance, family members and neighbours. Social distancing rules were adhered to by the 35 attendees.



Romsey Branch

True to the spirit of the RAF family, branch members have rallied round after lockdown, stepping up to be part of Op CONNECT and supporting each other. A Romsey Branch member living in north England contacted High Wycombe branch to arrange support for someone in Maidenhead, and Romsey Branch arranged for a member of the local voluntary fire service to visit and replace a time-expired smoke detector for someone else. Finally, even with the ongoing COVID-19-enforced social distancing, we commemorated VE Day; individually and by attending televised and streamed events and church services, including one conducted by our Branch Chaplain.

Rutland Branch

The Zoom video conferencing app helped Rutland Branch link up in early May for their scheduled monthly meeting. The software's compatibility with personal computer and mobile devices enabled members to see and hear Richard Foster's presentation "Around the World in 35 years 229 days". Future branch meetings will be by this media until further notice. For dates of meetings and information contact the branch secretary.



Ryedale Branch

Three new Vice-Presidents (VPs) were elected at the branch's AGM in early March. This honorary title is awarded to members who have given exemplary service to the branch over a number of years. Standing: Chairman Andy Sollitt, MBE with new VP Mo Taylor. Seated: L-R new VP Eric Rowsby, President Cyril Shreeve, Vice-President Norman Appleton, new VP Trevor Schofield. The meeting was held during the first week of March, just before the COVID-19 lockdown commenced and meetings were suspended until further notice.



Sheffield Branch

The photograph (top of next column) shows the annual commemoration service for the crew of the American B17 Flying Fortress 'Mi Amigo', who all were killed on 22 February 1944 at this location in Endcliffe Park, Sheffield. In attendance were, among others, Branch Secretary Squadron Leader Barry Darwin (Rtd.), Reverend Claire Dawson, trumpeter Norman Cawkwell, and USAF and USN Personnel from RAF Menwith Hill and RAF Digby. Barry Darwin was aged just four when the aircraft crashed a mile away from him.



Sud-Ouest Branch

The branch was very fortunate to be able to hold the 2020 AGM on 7 March, before the confinement procedures were enacted. The lure of a good Grand Cru Classé vineyard at the Chateau du Pressac played its part and 47 members and guests attended. In France now, self-certified attestation is needed to leave the house and without it police can exact a €365 on-the-spot fine. The branch normally supports 33 local RAF ceremonies each year, which are now being cancelled, but we are finding new ways to commemorate where we can (see photo).



Torquay Branch

Before lockdown, Torquay Branch had been raising money in a local hotel for the Wings Appeal. The hotel holds an annual "We'll Meet Again" period, where every three days new guests arrive, and branch members provide a short talk about the RAF Association, followed by a bucket collection. Over £10,000 has been raised since 2009 in the hotel. In the photo are: Steve Colhoun, Branch Chairman; Claire Boustead, Branch Wings Fundraising Co-ordinator and Treasurer; and Sophie Coldicott, Branch Secretary.



Towyn and Aberdovey Branch

In February, the branch helped their oldest member celebrate his 100th birthday and presented him with a certificate from Association HQ. John Hazzlewood joined the RAF five days after Britain declared war on Germany, and spent much of the war in India. The photograph shows John while on leave, having trekked on horseback to the 13,000ft Rhotang Pass in the Himalayan Mountains. His many letters home were the subject of an article in Air Mail's July 2019 issue. On 1 March the branch also continued its long-standing tradition of celebrating St David's day, this year with a luncheon at The Victorian Slipway in Tywyn.



Wittering and District Branch

In addition to helping deliver vital bag drops through the Association's Op CONNECT, the branch also marked the 75th anniversary of VE-Day in May by providing its more vulnerable members with commemorative gift bags. These included supplies and VE-Day themed memorabilia.



York Branch

Numbers at the AGM in mid-March were down on previous years (27 attended) due to the ongoing COVID-19 threat, but the president was still pleased to present Annual Branch Award certificates to Kath Allison (retiring as Membership Secretary), Ron Ford, Catherine Hanson (retiring as Deputy Welfare Officer) and Gill Gray. When the pandemic situation worsened, the Club was closed until further notice. All the events and social gatherings planned for spring have been cancelled but our Welfare Officer has been very busy, assisted by branch volunteers, contacting our older members in the vulnerable category to ensure they are keeping safe and well.

We welcome all submissions for Branch News, preferably by email to BranchNews@rafa.org.uk. Your word count should be no more than 100 words and have accompanying photographs. If sent via email, please attach as a separate image file and at a size of at least 1MB (and ideally 300dpi). Submissions can also be sent by post to the address on the inside front cover. Unfortunately photographs submitted by post cannot be returned. Photos of insufficient quality may not be published. Due to space limitations, submission does not guarantee inclusion and where there are too many reports for an issue, the editor reserves the right to select the broadest range of news and photos to reflect the geography, people and different activities of the Association. Only submissions made by email will be acknowledged before publication. The deadline for inclusion in the next Branch News is 14 August 2020.

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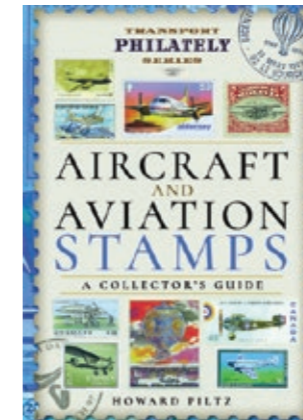
Culture Vultures



"Time Flies: reflections of a fighter pilot"
by David Hamilton
Publisher: Fonthill
£18.99

Time Flies offers an insight into the world of an RAF pilot, from interceptions of Soviet bombers off Iceland to defending Saudi Arabia in the first Gulf War. It follows the thirty-year career of David Hamilton, who operated Lightnings defending the UK, flew F-4 Phantoms from HMS Ark Royal and commanded a Tornado F3 squadron. Hamilton also formulated the operational requirements for the Eurofighter Typhoon, flew with the Red Arrows, served as the deputy station commander at RAF Leuchars, and led the Tornado flypast over Edinburgh Castle as the Stone of Destiny was returned to Scotland in 1996. This richly illustrated book is a serious study for both aviation enthusiasts and military historians.

Association members can get 40% off this book by visiting bit.ly/D_Hamilton and using the code **RAFA40**.



"Aircraft and Aviation Stamps"
by Howard Piltz
Publisher: Pen & Sword Books
£16.99

For the third book in this series on public transport featured on postage stamps, the author combines two lifelong hobbies: philately and aviation. While not an exhaustive survey, it weaves history and anecdotes around items in the author's own extensive collection. It winds a roughly eastwards journey around the globe, starting in the United Kingdom. Along the way, national histories are uncovered and accomplished artists admired, allowing both philatelists and lovers of flight to enjoy many beautiful miniature works of art. *Aircraft and Aviation Stamps* features over 250 colour illustrations, and includes new historical information ideal for collectors and aircraft and aviation enthusiasts.

Association members can get 25% off this book by visiting bit.ly/H_Piltz or calling **01226 734222** and using the code **RAFA25**.



"To Defeat the Few"
by D. Dildy and P. Crickmore
Publisher: Osprey
£30.00

Over the past 80 years, histories of the Battle of Britain have consistently portrayed the feats of 'the Few' as being responsible for the RAF's victory in the epic battle. However, this is only part of the story. The results of an air campaign cannot be measured in terms of territory captured, cities occupied or armies defeated. Successful air campaigns are those that achieve their intended objectives. The Luftwaffe, of course, did not, and this detailed and rigorous study explains why. Analysing the battle in its entirety, this book re-examines this remarkable conflict. Presenting the events of the Battle of Britain in the context of the Luftwaffe's campaign and RAF Fighter Command's battles against it.

Association members can get 25% off this book by visiting bit.ly/Dildy_Crickmore or calling **01256 302699** and using the code **RAFA25**.

(Publication date of 9 July correct at time of going to print).



War memorials and commemoration
The Open University
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This free short course provides the opportunity to explore the theme of commemoration and memorialisation. Various ideas are covered during the course, including: the need to commemorate; where war memorials can be located and why; what forms memorials take; what function memorials have; how meaning is conveyed in a memorial; and why we think that one building or shape is more appropriate than another. This introductory course is estimated to take four hours of study to complete, though it can be done in as many sittings as you wish. Participants signing up to the course can track their progress, access all course quizzes and activities and receive a free 'statement of participation' upon completion.

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Sunday 15 September 1940 saw the climax of the Battle of Britain. The Luftwaffe launched a series of massive attacks against London and other British cities, trying to finally defeat the RAF. But for them, the day was a failure. **Chris Goss** recounts the story as seen through the German and British pilots' eyes.

Misserfolg: the German view of Battle of Britain Day



A Heinkel 111 over the Thames, September 1940.

After individual skirmishes in the early morning, the first full German attack came at 1150hrs when 21 Messerschmitt 109 fighter-bombers headed for the capital. Bombs were dropped at Lambeth, Streatham, Dulwich and Penge, but caused little damage and few casualties.

Twenty minutes later, 27 Dornier 17s appeared over London's suburbs. Their mission had got off to a bad start: they had flown into a layer of cloud over the French coast, forcing them to break formation and adding ten minutes while they re-formed. Then a headwind delayed them and limited the endurance of their Messerschmitt 109 escorts. Their objective was either the docks or the railway junction at Latchmere End but, due to the massive number of Spitfires and Hurricanes sent to intercept them, damage to the targets was slight and, as they turned for home, German casualties began to rise.

One of the most spectacular and well-known losses was a Dornier 17 flown by Oberleutnant Robert Zehbe. Attacked by swarms of RAF fighters, it was claimed 'shot down' by at least six British pilots. One of them, Sergeant Ray Holmes of 504 Squadron, rammed the bomber, causing it to break up. Ray's combat report reads:

"I attacked the right flank machine from quarter to astern. Pieces flew from the wings and a flame appeared in the port wing but went out again. After breaking away I climbed up to a single Dornier and made two quarter attacks. Pieces flew off. My windshield was now splashed with black oil. I attacked a third time and [a] member of the crew baled out. On my fourth attack from the port beam, a jar shook my starboard wing as I passed over the enemy aircraft and I went into an uncontrollable spin. I think enemy aircraft must have exploded beneath me. I baled out and as I landed I saw the Dornier hit the ground by Victoria Station about half a mile away."

Six bombers were lost in this attack, with another two badly damaged. 12 aircrew were killed, 10 captured and three wounded. The escorts also fared badly as Messerschmitt 109 pilot Feldwebel Herbert Tzschoppe recalls:

"We were flying at about 3,500m... with our flaps down so that we could stay close to the slower bombers. During a turn, we were attacked by Spitfires which came out of the sun... My plane was hit in both wings. I... tried to hide in the clouds. However, when I came out I was hit by a second burst so I threw off the cabin roof and undid my seat belt. A third burst hit home - from the instrument panel there came flames like an oxyacetylene torch and my hands and face were severely burned.

An explosion followed and I found myself hanging on a parachute..."

The next attack was against the Royal Victoria, West India and Surrey Commercial docks in east London. The assailants this time were Dornier 17s and Heinkel 111s - 114 bombers flying in three parallel columns three miles apart.

Again, the RAF fighters threw themselves at the bombers and their escorts with dogfights occurring over much of Kent, London, East Sussex and Essex. London was then spared serious bomb damage as the Germans' targets were obscured by cloud when they got there.

German losses were again high. Bomber pilot Leutnant Josef Steudel remembers the day well: "The approach was too long - we were tired before the attack. At the coast we had to circle as the fighters were late. On top of that our formation was in disarray. Our fighters had once again allowed themselves to get entangled in dogfights and we were unprotected. Suddenly a tight formation of fighters appeared close to us. At first we thought they were our own but we were mistaken. A formation of Spitfires was flying directly at us, firing all guns. They avoided a collision only by veering off last moment, some above us, some below. Several even had the nerve to fly right through our formation."

"Several even had the nerve to fly right through our formation"

"This frontal attack by the Tommies was a completely new tactic that split up our formation. After that they had an easy game as they



Top: Luftwaffe fighter pilots re-enact their combat; the pilot on the right flew on Battle of Britain day but was killed later in the war.

Above: Dornier 17s seen in the skies over England; this unit was active on 15 September 1940.

Left: The remains of Robert Zehbe's Dornier 17 at Victoria Station.



could hunt and shoot us down individually. The two planes to my right veered off below me as I was pursued by a whole pack of Spitfires."

Steudel's Dornier 17 suffered slight damage, but he got back. Messerschmitt 109 pilot Unteroffizier Hermann Streibing was not so lucky:

"North of London...I was hit in my starboard wing - a result of which I lost a significant percentage of manoeuvrability. The situation dictated that I had to disengage from the dogfight. I veered off direction back to Calais but on my way back I was attacked by two British fighters who literally chewed up my plane with machine gun fire. I received several hits. My only chance in eluding them lay ahead when I dived as fast as possible into a big cloud." He lost his pursuers but was also losing coolant: "A short time later my engine began to seize which, together with my limited manoeuvrability, made it difficult to steer the plane. Everything went so fast the last few moments and I was forced to bale out. I remember trying to steer my crippled plane so as to avoid houses."

He did manage to avoid houses, but his fighter crashed in the graveyard at Hartlip near Sittingbourne in Kent. He was lucky to survive. Having baled out so low his partly open parachute snagged on a chimney from where he had to be cut down.

15 September 1940

Two of the last German bombers to crash on land on 15 September 1940 were believed to be Dornier 17s brought down by colliding with Hurricanes. The first crashed at Marden in Kent after brushing with Flying Officer Paddy Stephenson of 607 Squadron. The second was eventually brought down when it collided with a Hurricane of 605 Squadron as the squadron records show:

"Pilot Officer Cooper Slipper... baled out near Marden. He returned... apparently unshaken, with two German Mae Wests and a complete rubber dinghy given to him by Maidstone police."

As German aircraft retreated from London, 26 Heinkel 111s attacked Portland in Dorset. They were intercepted by 152 Squadron who claimed one Heinkel destroyed and another damaged.

The final daylight attack was by a specialist fighter-bomber unit which launched 10 Messerschmitt 110s and three Messerschmitt 109s against the Supermarine Works at Woolston just outside Southampton, the factory making Spitfires. They hit houses and shops killing nine civilians, badly injuring 19 and slightly injuring 23. 34 buildings were destroyed and 81 more were so badly damaged they had to

"My plane was hit in both wings. I tried to hide in the clouds"

be demolished.

That night 181 Luftwaffe aircraft attacked London, dropping 224 tons of bombs plus 279 incendiary containers.

They also attacked Worthing, Bournemouth, Portsmouth, Liverpool, Avonmouth, Southampton, Cardiff and Gloucester.

Luftwaffe reports say 148 bombers had attacked London between 1250 and 1600hrs that day, dropping 1,288 bombs (132,000 kg total) - and 108 incendiary containers. They admitted defences were very strong and that

they lost 20 Dornier 17s, 18 Messerschmitt 109s, eight Heinkel 111s, three Messerschmitt 110s and three Junkers 88s. But they claimed 51 Spitfires, 26 Hurricanes and a Bristol Blenheim in return. Today, we can say that the Luftwaffe lost 56 bombers and fighters for the RAF's 28 fighters. London had been bombed but rail traffic was only disrupted for three days and the docks, this time, were unscathed.

The day showed that RAF Fighter Command was not on its knees. Germany now began to switch to attacks by night and, on 19 September 1940, Adolf Hitler postponed the proposed invasion of Great Britain.

The final world goes to a German officer who had been captured that Sunday afternoon. After being taken into London for interrogation, he wrote in his diary:

"My first sensation when I saw the damage caused by our bombing was one of complete amazement. I had pictured an altogether greater degree of destruction but only very few houses were destroyed and the traffic in the streets carried on as normal. In Hyde Park, people were sitting peacefully on chairs and benches as if nothing had happened and bus, tram and underground services proceeded with astonishing frequency. A bomb crater was an exception in this peaceful picture."

Translation: *Misserfolg* = 'failure'.

Above: This Messerschmitt 109 crashed landed near Uckfield in Sussex at 1230 hrs on Battle of Britain Day and was later displayed around the UK.

Top left: This Do 17Z managed to get as far as eight kilometres north of Poix on 15 September 1940. With one engine stopped due to a fighter attack, the pilot successfully crash landed. The observer was the only crew member wounded.

Bottom far left: Fighter pilot Unteroffizier Hans Schersand was reported missing on Battle of Britain Day.

Bottom left: Heinkel 111 gunner on return to France; the cartridge cases show the battle he must have had. All images © Chris Goss



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Kite Balloon Winch

To mark 80 years since the Battle of Britain, the RAF Museum's **Andrew Renwick** looks at an unsung hero of Britain's wartime air defence.

The role of the Second World War's Fighter Command is well known, but the role of Balloon Command is often overlooked – despite the fact that both were responsible for the UK's air defence.

During the Second World War, barrage balloons were used to protect urban centres and other important locations, such as ports and factories. In the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, they offered a vital means of defence against the Luftwaffe as their trailing metal cables would severely damage or destroy any aircraft which touched them. Attackers attempting to shoot down a balloon could be caught in an explosion of the hydrogen used to get them airborne. German bombers also had to fly above the balloons, reducing their bombing accuracy.

Balloon Command was formed on 1 November 1938 with its headquarters at RAF Stanmore Park. Its squadrons were unusual in that they were made up of volunteers of the Auxiliary Air



Force. Women were also recruited, employed as fabric workers and as winch operators who brought the balloons back to the ground.

Balloons could be flown from ships or barges at sea, from fixed sites on land, or from mobile sites. They were usually tethered

by cables to concrete blocks, which were set in a circle in the ground. The Mk IV winch, shown here, was installed just behind the cab, and offered protection for the operator. The area at the rear was used to transport the deflated balloon.

In April 1941 the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations came into effect, and WAAF personnel became members of the Armed Forces of the Crown. Successful experiments in 1941 proved that women were capable of handling barrage balloons, despite initial doubts, and in 1942 approval was given for 1,246 sites to be staffed by WAAF crews, and 853 by RAF crews. The number of WAAF crews was soon increased to 1,376.

Barrage balloons were used throughout the war. Balloon Command was disbanded in February 1945 after long distance attacks by V-1 rockets were stopped by the capture of their launch sites in northern France.



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Above: The RAF Museum's Fordson Thames Sussex 917T, with Mk IV winch. Fordson was a brand of the Ford Motor Company used for tractors and commercial vehicles, with the Thames Sussex being a commercial 3-tonne, 6 x 4 chassis. © RAF Museum

Left: Liverpool, 1939. A partly-inflated balloon floats above the winch-mounted lorry. To the left is the lorry's trailer, which carried the balloon's hydrogen tanks. © RAF Museum

OTHER NEWS FROM THE RAF

617 Squadron taking part in Exercise RED FLAG at Nellis Air Force Base

SAC Amy Lupton © MOD/Crown 2019



A multi-million-dollar, multi-national military data centre has opened in Florida, designed to give each country's F-35 Lightning aircraft an operational advantage in combat missions. More than ten years in the making, the centre has achieved its Initial Operating Capability. It will enable Lightning pilots to fly into hostile air space, confident that their aircraft's computer systems will help them to safely complete even the most dangerous and demanding missions.

Behind the virtually windowless, thick concrete walls of the Australian, Canadian and United Kingdom Reprogramming Laboratory (ACURL), highly trained specialists compile and test Mission Data File Sets (MDFS). The MDFS are used on-board the Lightning and 'fused' with the masses of information gathered by the aircraft's numerous sensors to show the pilot exactly the information he or she needs to make the right decision.

On the other side of the United States, RAF Lightnings have deployed to the RED FLAG exercises for the first time. Five aircraft from 617 Squadron at Marham spent three weeks at

Nellis Air Force base near Las Vegas where they took part in the huge air combat exercises over the Nevada ranges. Typhoons from 41 (Test and Evaluation) Squadron and a Voyager aircraft were also involved in the exercises.

RAF Typhoons have returned to Lithuania this summer to augment the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission, Operation Azotize. The deployment was formed around 6 Squadron based at Lossiemouth and operated out of Siauliai Air Base. Meanwhile other Typhoons have been back in action flying armed reconnaissance missions over Iraq and eastern Syria as part of the global coalition against the Daesh terrorist movement.

A force of over 600 RAF personnel has successfully passed a major NATO evaluation to prove the RAF's ability to conduct operations in challenging conditions. During a week in March, men and women from 135 Expeditionary Air Wing at RAF Leeming in North Yorkshire has three.

Policing to full warfighting – and involved eight Typhoons.

HM The Queen has approved the award of Battle Honours to a number of RAF squadrons. These are given to commemorate notable battles, actions, or engagements in which squadron aircrew or RAF Regiment personnel played a memorable part. The honours have been awarded to 32 operational flying squadrons and nine RAF Regiment squadrons for their service during operations in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. Six operational flying squadrons and nine RAF Regiment squadrons have been awarded the highest honour of 'Battle Honour with Emblazonment'.

A flight deck simulator which provides pilots with state-of-the-art training has been unveiled at RAF Waddington. The RAF is the



Squadrons honoured with the right to emblazon 'AFGHANISTAN 2001-2014' on their standard include No. II Squadron RAF Regiment, pictured after patrolling forward of Patrol Base Boldak in Helmand Province.

Corporal Andy Benson © MOPD/Crown 2012

first to take delivery of the Rivet Joint Operational Flight Trainer which incorporates the very latest 'glass cockpit' technology. The simulator will now be used by both RAF and US Air Force personnel to train to fly the RC-135 Rivet Joint, of which the RAF has three.

The runway at RAF Mount Pleasant in the Falkland Islands has undergone an upgrade to allow a wider variety of aircraft to use the base. The work was completed a week ahead of schedule despite adverse weather, additional flights and a last minute design change. Base commander Group Captain

Rupert Joel said: "We learnt lessons from recent runway re-surfacing at Northolt and Waddington to ensure success."

It has been announced that the Red Arrows will move to RAF Waddington when RAF Scampton closes in 2022. However, they will still use the Scampton air space for practicing their routines. The team also staged a flypast over London to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day – and Typhoons flew over Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast.

A flypast by a Spitfire and a Hurricane from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight was organised to celebrate the 100th birthday of Captain (now Colonel) Sir Tom Moore and his fundraising achievements for the NHS.

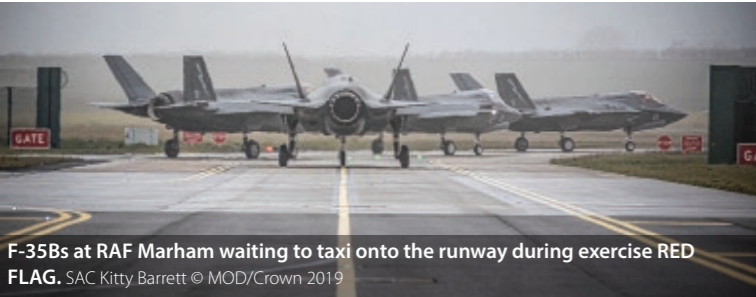
News of the RAF's contribution to the nation's fight against COVID-19 can be seen on page 11. AM

By Mike Curtis



Royal Air Force personnel taking part in the Op COLD IGLOO training phase, RAF Leeming, 21 Feb 2020. Op COLD IGLOO (NATO CAPEVAL) is the NATO assessment of the RAF. It sees the service tested in a variety of areas such as Force Protection, CBRN immediate action and Post Attack Recovery, all while delivering air power in a simulated hostile situation.

SAC Iain Curlett © MOD/Crown 2020



F-35s at RAF Marham waiting to taxi onto the runway during exercise RED FLAG. SAC Kitty Barrett © MOD/Crown 2019

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[†]Hose down several times a year – terms & conditions apply.

Calzone Pizza

TV chef, RAF Association supporter and former University Air Cadet Matt Tebbutt presents Daily Kitchen Live on BBC 1 every weekday, and has been offering advice on how to make healthy meals with limited ingredients during the COVID-19 lockdown. He is particularly fond of this calzone pizza recipe which he shared specially with the Association as part of Project ENTERTAIN: "There are no specialist ingredients, you don't need strong flour or yeast – which are things everyone has been struggling to get hold of – and you can make a batch and freeze the calzone so you can have pizza any time."



Above: These calzones could be frozen whole once made, after they have been cooked. Below: Matt Tebbutt supported the RAF Association at the ICAP Charity Day in December 2019, helping to raise the funds needed to deliver our new 'Finding it Tough?' mental wellbeing training courses. © Matt Tebbutt



Calzone Pizza Serves 4

Ingredients for the dough

- 125g plain flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- Large pinch of salt
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1 tbsp sunflower oil
- 2-3tbsp water

Ingredients for the calzone filling

- 50g mozzarella, grated or torn
- 1 tin of chopped tomatoes, reduced by half in a pan
- 4 sticks of sprouting broccoli
- ½ onion, peeled and sliced
- 50g cheddar cheese, grated - or any other cheese
- 2 rashers of bacon, cooked
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and chopped
- 2tbsp fresh herbs, or 1tsp dried herbs

Method

- Place all the ingredients into a large glass bowl and mix together to form a dough. Or place in a stand mixer with a dough hook attachment and mix until a dough is formed.
- On a floured work surface, roll out the dough into 4 circles.
- Pre-heat the oven to 200C. Place the baking tray or pizza stone in the oven to heat up
- Place all the ingredients on one side of each circle and fold the dough over to create pasty shapes. Seal using your fingers or a fork.
- Place on the lined baking tray or pizza stone - carefully, as it will be hot. Cook for 15-20 minutes.

Substitutes and nuggets

- Tomato purée or sun-dried tomatoes blended can be used instead of tinned tomatoes.
- Any left-over vegetables can be used. Or you can use frozen or tinned.
- Any meat, or left-over cooked meats can be used.
- Frozen onion and garlic can be used.
- The dough can be made the day before and left in the fridge overnight.
- Don't freeze them raw.
- You can use frozen broccoli from this recipe. But make sure you defrost it first before putting in the calzone, or it will release too much water and make the dough soggy.

Notices

REUNIONS

29/30/31st Entry Boy Entrant Telegraphists Annual Reunion.

This annual reunion will take place on 9 and 10 Oct 2020 at Barnsdale Hall Hotel, Oakham. It is open to all ex Boy Entrant Telegraphists. If interested, please contact Eddie Owen on 01572 755383 or email: eddieowen2@talktalk.net

Vulcan Crew Chief Register (VCCR). The 2020 reunion will be held on 9 and 10 October at the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa. For details please see www.vulcancrewchief.org or contact: bobhine57@gmail.com

OLD COLLEAGUES

The **RAF Locking Apprentices Association** welcomes contact from apprentices who trained at RAF Locking or RAF Cranwell and wish to renew comradeship. Visit: www.raflaa.org.uk or call 01933 317357.

Any news of or contacts for **Tom Cumberland** or **Ron Bayne**? They are the last two members of 78 Entry RAFC Cranwell 1958-60 not yet traced. Contact Gus Ross on: a.ross533@btinternet.com or 07944 877806 with information.

Is there was anyone out there lucky enough, like me, to have been part of the route lining for the **Queen's coronation** in 1953? We were positioned in Oxford Street. It would be interesting to swap yarns of the occasion. If there is, and you would like to, please contact Jim Dennett at: kurlingjim@gmail.com or on 01942 724477.

Seeking information on **103 Squadron's Johnny Dewing** from Yorkshire, mid-upper gunner on William 'Duke' Baker's Lancaster crew from Oct 1944 – Mar 1945. The families of his former crew mates would like to connect with him or his descendants to find out how he settled post-war. Contact Pat Stone (Dud's wife) at: patstone999@gmail.com

RAF Boy entrants 15th Entry, January 1952. Bill Beaumont (ex Boy, 1952) would like to hear from anyone of any trade who was a boy entrant at RAF Cosford. You may have photos or other details of your time. Please contact: bill_lyn20032000@yahoo.com

Cecil 'Bob' Milton would like to contact any 16th Entry Boy Entrants (1952) from RAF Yatesbury's No 2 Radio School. **Ginge Homer, Maxwell Boag** or **John McVitte** in particular. Email: papa_milton@hotmail.com

OTHER

In 1945, while flying with **7 Squadron**, we were scheduled to go to the Far East. This was not to be part of Tiger Force, but to support

SOLUTION: SUMMER CROSSWORD 2020

Across: 1 Tres; 3 Booby prize; 9 Kiss; 10 Strategist; 12 Paperwork; 13 Eclat; 14 The Antipodes; 18 Chocolate box; 21 Ratio; 22 Packaging; 24 Avaricious; 25 RAFA; 26 Dutch uncle; 27 Left. **Down:** 1 Take pity; 2 Easy prey; 4 Outdo; 5 Blackpool; 6 Preferential; 7 Iclie; 8 Estate; 11 French polish; 15 Inception; 16 Abdicate; 17 Exigant; 19 Errand; 20 Strait; 23 Cruel.

the army. However, not even the MOD seems to know how many other squadrons, if any, were due to go. Any information on this, or on potential airfield destinations, would be most welcome. Contact Godfrey Dann on: godfreydann05@gmail.com

Information sought about my father, **575086 Master Pilot George Henry Richardson** (right). He was in Coastal, Transport and Bomber Command, stationed at Topcliffe, St Mawgan, St Eval, Ballykelly and more. He served with 203, 204 and 240 squadrons among others. He left the RAF in 1958 after Grapple Y, flying alongside Wing Commander WD Hodgkinson and responsible for photography over Christmas Island. Contact Ray at: rdrichardson@hotmail.co.uk



If any former **RAF Postal Clerk** has any knowledge of the trade's history, or attended the Clerk Secretarial conversion course at RAF Kirton Lindsey in 1964, I (Alan 'Taff' Thomas) would be pleased to hear from them at: datsat@sky.com. I myself served as an RAF postie at RAF Oakington and RAF Cardington between 1961 and 1965.

Seeking pictures of former **RAF Sharjah** (closed 1971) and **RAF Masirah** (closed 1977). If you can help, please contact Colin Pomeroy at: CPomeroy@aol.com

Looking to locate a copy of the **Composite Flight Servicing Schedule AP** for either Jet Provost Mk 3 / Mk 5 (preferable) or Gnat T1 aircraft types. As a retired tech author and former 'Liney' who worked on these aircraft in the 1970s, I'm hoping to write a novel based on my experiences, and these schedules will help me recall some details. I may even name one of the characters after you if you can help - possibly even one of the nice ones! Contact Ed Harrod on: edharrod@aol.com

Membership of the **Medmenham Association** is open to serving and retired personnel of all branches of the Armed Services, Voluntary Reserve and Civil Service, who gained a recognised qualification as an Imagery Analyst or Photographic Interpreter, and are/were employed in MOD, Service or similar Allied establishments. Association membership is also available to applicants who have worked in a supporting role or have close working association with the PI/IA profession. Email: memsec@medmenham.org

Submit your notices – free for all members

Next deadline: 14 August 2020. Notices: a free member benefit to help you keep connected with people and places from your time in the RAF or the RAF Association, or to announce news of births, marriages, christenings, engagements, and more. A service for members only. To place a notice in the October–December 2020 issue: email your text to notices@rafa.org.uk, post it to the address on the inside front cover or call **0800 018 2361**.

AD ASTRA

We record with sadness the passing of the following members of the RAF Association

© Phil Greig



© Phil Greig

"In friendship and in service one to another, we are pledged to keep alive the memory of those of all nations who died in the Royal Air Force and in the Air Forces of the Commonwealth. In their name we give ourselves to this noble cause. Proudly and thankfully we will remember them."

Mr G Abbott
Mr E D Abrahams
Wing Commander M Adams
Mrs N Addis
Mr C Albrow
Mr E R Allaway
Mr T Allen
Mr J M Allen
Mr D Andrews
Mr B Armstrong
Mr G Arnold
Mr R Athol
Mr F Atkinson
Mr A Attrill
Mrs L M Bailey
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Air Commodore A Balfour
Mr J Balmer
Mr D Bambridge
Mr F Barrett
Mr R V Base
Mr R Basson
Mr W N Bays
Mr J Beake
Squadron Leader S Bennett
Mr B Bentley
Mr E Bickerdike-Hibbs
Mr J Bird
Mr D Blanch
Mr J Body
Mrs M Boon-Roos
Mr R Boreham
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We specially remember those members who had reached or passed their **100th birthday**

Mrs B Clark
South East & Eastern Area HQ

Squadron Leader W G Green DFC
Wythenshawe

Mrs M Weavil
Cockermouth

100

Please note: Air Mail cannot accept any obituary notifications direct. They must be notified to the member's branch or Area office. Alternatively, call our contact team on 0800 018 2361.

Honouring those who have departed

Terry Clark

Terry Clark, one of the last of the Few who fought against the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain, passed away on the eve of the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Terry trained as an air gunner and joined 219 Squadron at Catterick in July of 1940. He was awarded five medals, including the Distinguished Flying Medal for defending the city of York and its surrounding airfields. As a member of the Few, he also received the Battle of Britain clasp to the 1939/45 Star. (More details of his links with the Association on page 15).



Terry Clark ©Crown/MOD

Frank Elliott

D-Day veteran and a holder of the French Légion d'honneur, Frank Elliott flew with Bomber Command in the Second World War on special operations. He flew many missions and was highly decorated. Thurrock MP Jackie Doyle-Price said: "We remember the courage and service of men like Frank... At times like these we should take inspiration from those who went through so much." Frank died aged 95, on 16 April.

Ron Green

Ron Green joined the RAF in 1941, trained as a Lancaster pilot and served with 550 Squadron based at RAF North Killingholme during the Second World War. It is understood that after the war, Ron was involved in transporting people from the UK to attend the Nuremberg Trials, and also flew missions dropping food parcels into Berlin during the Berlin Airlift. Ron was an active member of the RAF Association, and was a former Chairman of Windsor Branch. He died on 24 March at the age of 98.

Joseph Henry Nolan

Henry Nolan passed away at the age of 96 on 4 April. Known as 'Ginge' by his aircrew due to his red hair, Henry was a mid-upper gunner on

Short Sterlings. He flew around 20 missions, crash landing in the UK on one occasion and being wounded by flack on another. At the age of 19 Henry was given the day off from service to marry his fiancée, and was escorted by armed guards to his wedding ceremony to ensure that he returned to duty straight after.

John Quine

Bomber Command veteran John Quine was born in Wales and raised in Bromsgrove where he spent most of his life. He joined the RAF in 1939, aged just 16, and piloted Lancasters during the Second World War. He flew a total of 22 missions, including Operation Manna, where the RAF dropped food to starving Dutch civilians during the last days of the war. John was 96 when he died.

Sydney Stevens

Sydney 'Steve' Stevens DFC AE* died in April, aged 98. A veteran Lancaster pilot with 57

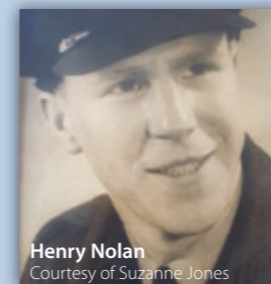
squadron, Steve flew 30 missions against targets in Germany and Italy. At that time, only one in five of the squadron's aircraft completed a tour of operations. "The world we did our bit to bring about is, for all its problems, an infinitely better place than the world subjected to Nazi tyranny" he said in 2018. "That is Bomber Command's legacy to the young men and women of today".

John Valentine

John Valentine joined the RAF in 1941 and flew in Lancasters and Wellingtons. After the war ended, he was posted to RAF Castel Bonito in Libya. On leaving the RAF, John worked as an accountant for British Leyland until his retirement in 1989. He continued to fly aircraft from Blackpool Airport during his retirement, and was a member of the Blackpool Aircrew Association. John passed away on 22 February, aged 96.

Leslie Warrell

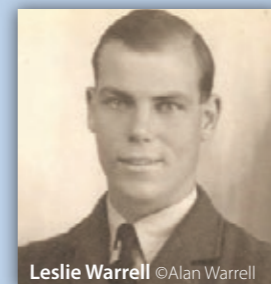
Leslie Albert Warrell passed away on 10 April, just short of his 100th birthday. He joined the RAF in 1938, trained as an electrician and joined 226 Squadron at RAF Harwell in 1939. Les then served with the squadron in France before it was forced to retreat to England in 1940. After postings at various UK stations, Les went overseas again in 1943, joining 160 Squadron in Ceylon. He volunteered to join the Royal Indian Air Force in November 1943 and served in Burma and the North West frontier.



Henry Nolan
Courtesy of Suzanne Jones



Steve Stevens
Courtesy of Jonny Cracknell



Leslie Warrell ©Alan Warrell



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