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No 50 & No 61 SQUADRONS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

ROYAL AIR FORCE CENTENARY



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THE WORLD'S FIRST INDEPENDENT AIR FORCE

In 1916-17, in response to air raids on Great Britain, the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) attempted deep penetration air raids against strategic targets in Germany. Although generally unsuccessful, the principle was established and on 17 Aug 1917 the Smuts Report, an exercise in brevity, recommended a separate ministry and air force be formed. It established the Air Ministry on 2 Jan 1918 and the amalgamation of the RNAS and Royal Flying Corps (RFC) to form the Royal Air Force (independent of the army and navy) on 1 Apr 1918. Maj Henry Walford Davies, the first RAF Director of Music, composed the “RAF March Past” for the new Service; it combines bugle calls of the RFC and the RNAS. In Feb 1924, HMS Hermes, the first ship to be designed and built as an aircraft carrier, was commissioned. Within weeks the RAF had formed the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) for RAF units normally embarked on aircraft carriers and fighting ships. In May 1939 control of the FAA was passed to the Admiralty and the RAF personnel returned; although the Admiralty has retained the title FAA.

As we celebrate the first 100 years of the RAF, it is hard to relate the SE5a of 1918 to the 2018 stealth multirole F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter, with a Short Take-Off and Vertical Landing capability. Named for the Second World War USAAF Lockheed P-38 twin-boom Lightning, it is a happy coincidence that the F-35B also shares the name of the RAF’s first supersonic fighter aircraft, the magnificent all-British Mach 2 English Electric Lightning. The Lightning II will initially be flown by 617 Sqn and 809 Naval Air Sqn in the UK and operate from the new aircraft carriers: HMS Queen Elizabeth in the mid-2020s and HMS Prince of Wales a few years later.

HM The Queen unveiled the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park, near the RAF Club, on 28 Jun 2012, in the presence of many Bomber Command veterans from around the world. A long wait, but a most fitting monument to the 55,573 aircrew lost; also a tribute to the late MRAF Sir Michael Beetham, who campaigned tirelessly for it. We do not have the space to explore the first Century of the RAF in great detail through the fraught early years; two world wars; Op Manna (food drops to Holland); Op Exodus (POW repatriation); Berlin Airlift (Soviet blockade of Berlin); Cold War and QRA; Suez crisis; Op Grapple, (series of nuclear tests at Malden and Christmas Islands); Aden Emergency; Falkland Islands War; Gulf War; Balkans War; and more recent conflicts. The RAF continues to execute peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, in addition to offensive strikes against insurgents, at the behest of the British government.

It has been most interesting, enjoyable and instructive to research and record the first 100 years of the RAF, albeit briefly and selectively. The Service can no longer be the World’s policeman; it is getting smaller as costs increase, budgets shrink and tasks reduce; but it is still a potent Force! Whatever the next 100 years may bring, we can be sure that the Royal Air Force will rise to all challenges. PER ARDUA AD ASTRA.

Richard Jones

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

In 1977, I was appointed to command No 50 Sqn, one of the 4 Vulcan B Mk 2 squadrons at RAF Waddington. Learning of the squadron's distinguished history, not least in WWII, I soon found myself meeting many of the survivors of Bomber Command's campaign and thus I began a long connection with the No 50/61 Sqn Association. It has been a privilege to have been a Vice President for many years and President since we lost Sir Michael Beetham in 2015.

Time passes, few veterans of WWII remain, and even the Canberra and Vulcan force veterans are getting older so the time has come to close down the formal Association. The Association has thrived over the years mainly because of the dedication of a few ex-RAF colleagues and our friends in Skellingthorpe village and in the Lincoln area. Fortunately, a core of the friends have now come to our rescue and have set up an association called "Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe" in order to keep the memories and the sense of sacrifice alive so that emerging generations can learn to appreciate what our WWII forebears achieved despite the appalling losses of life and injuries many received.

So, on behalf of all those who have the memories of 50 and 61 Squadrons in their DNA, thank you Skellingthorpe. **Nigel Baldwin**

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

After 15 years at the helm, it feels somewhat strange to be writing my comments for the Newsletter for the final time. But, for reasons that have been well explained over the past year or more, it is now the right time to move on under the new title Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe. Much has gone on behind the scenes during this past year to make sure that we hand over our legacy in good shape. Firstly, the Association Memorial will get a makeover so that it is in the best possible state for the coming years. Secondly, the Birchwood Leisure Centre has undergone a major refurbishment since last year and our memorabilia will soon be proudly on display in the new cafeteria. Thirdly, on 1 May, our President, Air Marshal Baldwin, will present the original 50 & 61 Squadrons' Casualty Roll of Honour to the Mayor of Lincoln at the Guildhall, where it will be put on permanent display.

Finally, once all bills have been paid, our remaining funds will be transferred to the Friends of Skellingthorpe, with a statement of account due in the next newsletter. We now look forward to our final dinner as an Association at the International Bomber Command Centre. Please note that attendance will be capped at 100 with Association members given priority if necessary. It only leaves me to say farewell and to thank you all for supporting me and the committee for the past 15 years. It has been a privilege and an honour. **Peter Jacobs**

THE WRIGHT FLYER ONE

The world's first controlled manned powered flight was made by bicycle-maker Orville Wright, in front of five witnesses, at 10.35 on Thu 17 Dec 1903 on a beach south of Kitty Hawk in North Carolina; it lasted 12 seconds and covered 120 feet into a 24 knot freezing head wind. The Wright Brothers National Memorial was erected on the site in 1927 to commemorate the event.



Wilbur Wright watches Orville make the first controlled manned powered flight

The Wright brothers started their flying experiments using gliders in 1896. The first flights were steered by wing warping (pulleys bending the leading edge to perform a turn); a very crude method of control, so the brothers searched for a safer and more accurate means of aircraft steering. They also sought an engine light enough and powerful enough for flight. No motor manufacturer could supply one, so with the help of their mechanic, Charlie Taylor, the brothers designed and built their own.

The elevators were placed at the front to protect the pilot in the event of a crash landing. Using the results of wind tunnel experiments, and learning as he went along, Wilbur Wright designed and carved the two 2.6m pusher propellers for the first flight. The search for accurate stability led to the brothers designing and perfecting the "Three-Axis Control" method: Pitch (elevators), Roll (ailerons) and Yaw (rudder); patented in May 1906 and still used today by most aircraft.

(First Flight photograph (taken with Orville's camera) by John Thomas Daniels Jr)

Acknowledgements to "The Wright Brothers-First Flight 1903."

PRINCIPAL ARCHITECTS OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

On Wed 16 Oct 1908, almost 5 years after the Orville Wright's momentous first flight in "Flyer One", the American showman, Samuel Cody, achieved Great Britain's first powered flight at Farnborough in an aircraft of his own design: the British Army Aeroplane No 1 (or the Cody One). On Fri 1 Apr 1911, the Air Battalion of the Royal Engineers was formed at Aldershot to continue Farnborough's work on observation balloons and man-carrying kites. On Sat 13 May 1912, the Air Battalion became the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). There were initially 3 Sqns; viz No 1, No 2 and No 3.

Further experimental work on airships and float planes was passed to the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). Great Britain's air power now comprised the RFC; the RNAS; the Central Flying School (CFS); the Royal Aircraft Factory (later the RAE) at Farnborough (which produced aircraft designs and some aircraft); and the Special Reserve, civilian pilots who could be drafted in as and when required. Whereas the War Office controlled the RFC, the RNAS was controlled by the Admiralty; unsurprisingly co-operation and communication between them proved contentious, frustrating and difficult!

The Army did not care for the idea of aircraft and saw no operational use for them. After all, the cavalry was available to charge the enemy; there was no place for these noisy and unreliable flying machines! In 1911, Field Marshal Sir William Nicholson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had delivered a withering verdict on the subject: "Aviation is a useless and expensive fad advocated by a few individuals whose ideas are unworthy of attention." The same year, Sir Douglas Haig had confidently asserted that "flying can never be of any use to the Army." Although he did moderate his view later.



AVM Sir William
Sefton Brancker

Fortunately others saw a brighter future for air power and laid robust foundations for the RFC and subsequently the RAF. The three prime movers were Lt Gen Sir David Henderson, Maj Gen Sir Hugh Trenchard and Maj Gen William Sefton Brancker. The latter was a most capable and experienced administrator who had learned to fly in 1913 and became the RFC Master-General of Personnel. Later, as AVM Sir William, he was the first Deputy Director of Military Aeronautics; he retired in 1918 to become the Director of Civil Aviation. He died in the R101 airship disaster, with Air Minister Lord Thomson, in Oct 1930.



Air Mshl
Sir David Henderson

Sir David Henderson was the first Director General of Military Aeronautics in 1913; the Head of British military aviation 1914-18; and an authority on tactical intelligence. Born in 1862, he had learned to fly in 1911, then, at 49, the world's oldest pilot. Henderson was also responsible for much of the advice and drafting leading to the implementation of the Smuts Report in Aug 1917. Trenchard often said that Henderson deserved the title: "Father of the Royal Air Force", rather than himself. Henderson's only son, Capt Ian Henderson MC RFC, was killed in a flying accident in Jun 1918. Henderson retired in 1919 and died in 1921 (10 years to the day he qualified as a pilot), aged 59. His Times obituary called him: "The Maker of the Royal Air Force".

Hugh Montague (Boom) Trenchard was born in 1873 and in 1893 served with the Royal Scots Fusiliers in India. He was a keen shot who played polo well, but lacked social graces. In the Mess he was known as "The Camel", for he rarely drank or spoke! He fought in the Second Boer War and in 1900 was hit in the lung and spine by a Boer bullet, causing partial paralyses below the waist. He convalesced in Switzerland and took up bob-sledding, but crashed on the Cresta Run. He was not injured and found he no longer had the partial paralysis. He returned to South Africa in 1901 and Nigeria in 1903. In 1910 illness forced him back to England to recuperate and then Ireland to rejoin his regiment. But in 1912 he clashed with his new CO and his friend, Eustace Loraine the pioneer British aviator, suggested he return to England and learn to fly; he did so and gained his flying certificate at the age of 39.

In Aug 1912, Maj Trenchard attended the first CFS course and in 1913 was appointed Asst Comdt and CFS staff examiner. So he set himself an exam, marked it and awarded himself his RFC wings! He commanded the RFC Military Wing in 1914 and the RFC in France in 1915-17. He served as the first Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) before taking command of the RAF in France in 1918. He returned to England as CAS in 1919 and founded the RAF Benevolent Fund. He spent the next decade successfully securing the future of the RAF. He was known as "Boom" for his stentorian tone whilst at CFS. He retired in 1930 to become Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. He died in 1956, aged 83; his ashes are buried in the Battle of Britain Chapel, Westminster Abbey. His wife, Lady Katherine, whom he married in 1920, died in 1960, aged 75. His grandson, also called Hugh, is the third Viscount.



MRAF Viscount Trenchard and HM Queen Elizabeth Buckingham Palace 1950

FIRST WORLD WAR - THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS

In 1912 the first CO of the RFC (Military Wing), Col Frederick Sykes, sought a motto for the new Service which would produce a strong esprit de corps. One of his officers, J S Yule, offered “Per Ardua ad Astra” (Through Adversity to the Stars). It was approved by HM King George V, and became the motto of the RFC and later also of the RAF. Sykes was the RFC Chief of Staff in 1914-15 and became the second CAS, briefly, in 1918. He retired in 1919 as AVM Sir Frederick KCB AFC and was appointed Controller-General of Civil Aviation. He was an MP, twice, and died in 1954, aged 77.



The BE 2 was extensively used by the RFC during the War. Some 3,500 were built and used for crew training, reconnaissance, as a light bomber and later in the War as a night fighter. It had a crew of two: pilot, aft, and observer, forward. In some later marks the crew positions were reversed.

Early aircraft crews had boxes of 500 metal darts (flechettes) to drop on the heads of the enemy below (considered by many to be most unsporting and ungentlemanly). Also usually a Lewis gun, operated by the observer on a Scarff ring, enabling the gun to be aimed towards the direction of threat. Later aircraft had single or twin guns mounted on the upper wing, controlled by the pilot; and remotely released bombs on racks under the lower wings. RFC air to air action became more successful after the synchronised interrupter gear, designed by Anthony Fokker, and liberated from a crashed Hun ac, enabled the guns to fire through the propeller. Other improvements were air photography and wireless; voice had replaced Morse by 1916.

The attrition rate of aircrew in the early days was appalling. The life expectancy could be just 3 weeks with one in four losing their lives; a similar rate to the infantry in the trenches below! Yet there was always a steady stream of young men queuing outside the recruiting offices eager to join the RFC “Aces” out to get the Hun! (One became an Ace with 5 or more kills).

Great Britain had declared war on Germany on 4 Aug 1914, and the RFC was deployed to France with 2, 3, 4 and 5 Sqns of 12 aircraft each. Which with main depots, gave a total strength of 63 aircraft and 900 men. The aircraft were a mixture of BE2's (2 and 4 Sqns); Bleriot monoplanes and Farmans (3 Sqn); and Farmans, Avro 504s and BE8s (5 Sqn). The RFC expansion plan for 1916, to take the front line strength to 32 sqns by Sep was almost achieved with 31 sqns.

OP MICHAEL was a major German offensive in Mar 1918. The RFC lost 250 aircraft in just four weeks; German bombing and shelling of RFC airfields contributing significantly to these losses. The Second Battle of the Somme, Aug-Sep 1918, took place in the skies above the trenches and it was the first time that an air campaign was planned to support ground ops.



Lt Billy Bishop RCAF

Lt William A (Billy) Bishop, 60 Sqn, was an Ace with 72 claimed kills; his CO (Maj Alan Scott) often authorised him to fly as a lone wolf. On 2 Jun 1917, his self attested lone attack on a German airfield which, he maintained, destroyed 4 enemy ac, earned him an extremely controversial VC. There are no German records of the attack, only Bishop's word that it took place. Many have doubted his version of the events. His was one of only two VCs ever awarded in violation of the warrant requiring several witnesses; the other was the Unknown Soldier. In Aug 1917, HM King George V invested Bishop with his VC, DSO and MC at Buckingham Palace. As Air Mshl W A Bishop VC CB DSO* MC DFC RCAF, he was instrumental in implementing and promoting the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. He died in 1956 aged 62.

Throughout much of the First World War, although the men in the tethered surveillance balloon baskets had parachutes, they were not issued to aircrews. RFC High Command (The War Office) felt that aircrews might be tempted to bail out in the event of enemy action or mechanical problems, rather than remain and try to save their aircraft. This could be seen as cowardice! Parachutes were able to be purchased privately, but none were known to have been; they were likely too big and too heavy for the early aircraft. The Calthrop 'Guardian Angel' parachute, issued to balloon crews in 1915, was becoming available to aircrews towards the end of the War.

The War ended at 1100 on 11 Nov; the first and last shots were fired at Mons. 12 members of the RFC were awarded the VC including: Capt Albert Ball 13 Sqn; Capt William Barker 201 Sqn; Capt Lanoe Hawker 6 Sqn; Capt James McCudden 56 Sqn; and 2nd Lt Gilbert Insall 11 Sqn (later a member of 50 Sqn).



The need to be able to identify allied aircraft became apparent early in the War and the Union Flag was painted on the under-surface of the lower wings. This was satisfactory at low level but was confusing when the aircraft were higher and only the cross was visible. This could often be mistaken for a German Kreuz (cross); so the French system of Roundels, with the colours reversed, was adopted by late 1915. It is still basically the same today.

By the end of the First World War, the RAF had some 291,170 personnel (in 1914 there were a little over 2,000), 150 sqns and 22,647 aircraft. The aircraft were much improved too. One of the best was the Sopwith F1, the iconic Camel; so called because of the metal fairing over the gun breeches, intended to protect the guns from freezing at altitude, created a hump. It was said to be hard to fly, but once mastered and in capable hands, it demonstrated superiority over the best German fighters.



WRAF Fitter working on the Liberty engine of a De Havilland D.H.9A in 1918



The Sopwith Camel (50 Sqn ac with Dingos) was said to get the pilot: “A wooden cross; the Red Cross or a Victoria Cross!”



The Sopwith Snipe was not a fast aircraft by the standards of its time, but its excellent rate of climb and manoeuvrability made it a good match for contemporary German fighters. It was selected as the standard post war single-seat RAF fighter and the last examples were not retired until 1926. 50 and 61 Sqns both flew the Snipe.

WOMEN'S ROLE DURING BOTH WORLD WARS

During the First World War, members of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) worked on air stations belonging to the RFC and the RNAS. When the decision was taken to merge the RFC and RNAS to form the RAF, serious concerns were raised about the loss of this specialised female workforce. The need for a separate women's air service led to the formation of the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) on Monday 1 April 1918; the same day that the RAF was formed. WAAC and WRNS personnel were able to transfer to the new Service and some 10,000 did so; civilian enrolment also swelled WRAF numbers. The minimum age was 18 years, and good health, especially for civilian candidates, was most important. They were posted to RAF bases, initially at Home and then later in 1919, to France and Germany. There were 2 categories: Immobiles, who lived at home and were attached to their local station (home defence); and Mobiles, who lived in quarters on or near their workplace and could be transferred elsewhere.

Educated women were given officer status, but could not be commissioned (the Army would not allow it)! They could be either Controllers or Administrators and were simply known as Miss (Surname). Other serving women were just called Members. In only two years, 32,000 WRAFs had proved a major asset to the RAF and paved the way for future servicewomen. Most women were employed as clerks, but many other trades were open to them, including tailoring, photography, driving, household and catering. Women also worked as technicians covering a wide range of trades, mostly skilled: munitions workers, parachute packers and aircraft fitters. They proved beyond doubt that they were the equal of men on the shop floor. The WRAF, a wartime force, was disbanded in 1920.



Members enjoying a smoke

The Woman's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), the Auxiliary Territorial Service and the Woman's Land Army were created at the outbreak of the Second World War and the conscription of women began in 1941. Over the next 4 years, some 250,000 women played a vital support role in the Services, in factories and on the land. Many women also joined the Voluntary Air Detachment and worked as medical orderlies, often close to the battlefield. The WAAF strength exceeded 180,000 at its peak in 1943. The passing of the Army and Air Force (Women's Service) Act in 1948 created the opportunity for a permanent peacetime role for women in the Army and RAF, in recognition of their invaluable wartime contribution. The WAAF became the WRAF again in Jun 1949 under the command of Comdt Dame Felicity Hanbury. She retired in 1950 and married Air Cdre Sir Harald Peak in 1952; she died in 2002.

ROYAL AIR FORCE COMMISSIONED RANKS

In 1918, General Henderson insisted that officers of the newly formed Royal Air Force should have their own discrete ranks, rather than the army ranks used by the RFC. He sought a combination of military and naval rank titles. The former for junior officers and the latter for senior officers. The Admiralty, however, objected strongly to the use of naval ranks, even with the addition of the word “Air”. They insisted that the RAF adopt its own rank titles. The 10 officer ranks used today were eventually agreed. But there were several other suggestions; perhaps the most bizarre was: Ensign; Lieutenant; Flight-Leader; Squadron Leader; Reeve; Banneret; Fourth-Ardian; Third-Ardian; Second-Ardian; Ardian; and Marshal of the Air. King George V objected to the rank of Marshal of the Air, saying that it “sounded too much like it encroached on the attributes of God!”

The ranks finally agreed were those we use today: Pilot Officer and Flying Officer (OF1); Flight Lieutenant (OF2); Squadron Leader (OF3); Wing Commander (OF4); Group Captain (OF5); Air Commodore * (OF6); Air Vice Marshal ** (OF7); Air Marshal *** (OF8); Air Chief Marshal **** (OF9); and Marshal of the Royal Air Force ***** (OF10) (no longer conferred in peacetime). (OF is the NATO grade to enable rank comparisons between all NATO officers)



HM The Queen Mother and MRAF Sir Michael Beetham at the unveiling of the statue of Sir Arthur Harris at St Clement Danes in the Strand on 31 May 92. The 50th Anniversary of the first 1000 bomber raid and the Centenary of Harris's birth.

Lord Trenchard was the first to be promoted MRAF, on 1 Jan 1927. The last two holders of the substantive rank are MRAF Lord Craig and MRAF Sir Keith Williamson. HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, HRH The Prince of Wales and Lord Stirrup hold the honorary rank. The latter bestowed in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 2014.

Until 1997, the Chief of the Air Staff was promoted MRAF on his last day of service (or if taking the appointment of Chief of the Defence Staff). There have been 27 promotions to MRAF, including 5 members of the Royal Family. MRAF Sir Peter Harding resigned his commission in 1994 and his name no longer appears in the Air Force List.

SECOND WORLD WAR - ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Second world War started, officially, at 1100 on 3 Sep 1939. Under Article XV of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan of Dec 1939, the air forces of British Commonwealth countries trained and formed Sqns, mostly in Canada, for service with RAF formations. Many individual personnel from these countries, and exiles from Occupied Europe, also served with RAF sqns. By the end of the war the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) had contributed more than 30 sqns to serve in RAF formations; a quarter of Bomber Command's personnel were Canadian, (6 Group had a RCAF AOC). Moreover, the Royal Australian Air Force represented around 9% of all RAF personnel who served in the European and Mediterranean theatres.

During the Battle of Britain, Jul - Oct 1940, Fighter Command (supplemented by two Fleet Air Arm Squadrons, Polish, Czecho-Slovak and other multinational pilots and ground personnel) defended the skies over Britain against the numerically superior German Luftwaffe. In what is perhaps the most prolonged and complicated air campaign in history, the Battle of Britain contributed significantly to the delay and



Hurricane and Spitfire (In Memory of The Few)

Churchill, said of the Battle of Britain pilots, in an eloquent speech to the nation: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few".

The largest RAF effort during the War was the strategic bombing campaign against Germany by Bomber Command. While RAF bombing against Germany began almost immediately upon the outbreak of war, under the inspired leadership of Sir Arthur (Butch) Harris, these attacks became increasingly more devastating from 1942 onward with superior technology and greater numbers of aircraft. The attacks on Nuremberg and Dresden were hotly contested at the time and even today they evoke very strong feelings. On 2/3 Jan 1945, Nuremberg was comprehensively carpet bombed resulting in a death toll of 1,838 with 90% of the city destroyed

s u b s e q u e n t
i n d e f i n i t e
postponement of
Hitler's plans for an
invasion of the
United Kingdom
(O p e r a t i o n
Sealion). In the
House of Commons
on 20 August,
prompted by the
ongoing efforts of
the RAF, the Prime
Minister, Winston

by the ensuing firestorm. Six weeks later, Bomber Command attacked Dresden and laid it to waste. Both raids were controversial. Especially as they were made so late in the war when the Reich was weakened. We neither condone nor condemn them. We know now, but we did not know then, just how soon the War would be over. The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, had said in 1940: “The fighters are our salvation but bombers alone provide the means of victory”. This is inscribed on the Bomber Command Memorial. Victory in Europe (VE) Day was on 8 May 1945 and Victory in Japan (VJ Day) on 15 Aug. The Prime Minister praised almost everyone involved, but not members of Bomber Command; probably for political reasons. He was not re-elected in 1945.

On the night 30/31 Mar 44, on a Nuremberg raid, 96 Bomber Command aircraft failed to return and 10 crashed on landing; 545 men were lost. More than in the whole 15 weeks of the Battle of Britain. Plt Off Cyril Barton, aged 22 years, the captain of a 578 Sqn Halifax aircraft, was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. There was no Bomber Command medal and many veterans felt cheated. Clasps

to be worn on the 1939-45 Star could be claimed and were presented to Battle of Britain and Bomber Command veterans in 2012 and 2014.



The 50 Sqn Lancaster bomber VN-B, flown by Fg Off Mike Beetham in 1943/44, over RAF Skellingthorpe. Detail from a painting by. WO Reg Payne; MRAF Sir Michael Beetham's war-time WOp.

We should not forget the vital work done by the RAF Pigeon Service (truly)! 250,000 pigeons were used by the Services in both world wars and saved many lives. They were carried in aircraft and took coded messages back to their home coops in the UK and Occupied Europe. Many downed aircrews owe their lives to a pigeon. Thirty-two of these gallant birds were awarded the Dickin Medal,

the animal VC, for bravery. We should also remember all the other animals who gave their lives for freedom. Sadly very few of the millions of horses used in France in 1914-18 came home. Quite rightly there is an “Animals at War” Memorial in Park Lane, dedicated to those animals who bravely served alongside troops in time of war; and honouring all the animals who failed to return.

26 VCs were awarded to RAF aircrew in the Second World War, including one to William Reid (61 Sqn) and one posthumously to Leslie Manser (50 Sqn).



Four young “Atagirls” from the Air Transport Auxiliary. They were from unoccupied European countries and remained civilians, taking aircraft to and from the manufacturers and the sqns; flying just about everything from the Spitfire to the Lancaster and running the risk of attacks by German aircraft. They held their last reunion at RAF Fairford a few years ago. The last known British ATA pilot, Joy Lofthouse, died in Nov 2017, aged 94.

Below are 2 of the many recruitment posters. The airmen on the left are possibly 5 members of a bomber crew rather than Fighter pilots.



(Acknowledgments and grateful thanks to Malcolm Barrass RAFVR(T)
“Air of Authority” for freely allowing information from his excellent site)

EQUALITY IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

The RAF is an equal opportunities employer. There are some 33,000 RAF Service personnel today and 14% are women, including 2 senior air officers: AVM Susan Gray (Air Officer Commanding 38 Group) and AVM Elaine West (Director of Projects at the Defence Infrastructure Organisation). In 1959 women were able to become Air Quartermasters and in 1962 were the first women to be formally recognised as aircrew.

Until the WRAF and RAF were formally merged in 1994, the highest ranking women were Director WRAF and the Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service (PMRAFNS) Matron-in-Chief, both air cdres (1*). The former post was abolished at the WRAF merger and the latter (now either male or female) is a gp capt post (the current Matron-in-Chief is male). Men and women are fully integrated and belong to all branches and trades; the RAF Regiment is now open to women. There is a female AOC; female station commanders and operational squadron commanders. Air Cdre David Case is the highest ranking black officer in the RAF. If a person is right for the task, their colour or gender is just not important.



The first all-female Tornado crew in 2009: Pilot Flt Lt Juliette Fleming (L) and WSO (Nav) Sqn Ldr Nikki Thomas (R). They both saw action in Afghanistan.

In 2015, the now Wg Cdr Nikki Thomas, became the first female fast jet Sqn Cdr as OC 12 Sqn, RAF Marham.

During training at RAF College Cranwell, all cadets, whether ex-serving personnel, civilian, men, women, black, Asian or white are treated exactly the same. They all undergo the same rigorous physical and leadership exercises and training. It is hard work but the commissioning parade, the Graduation Ball afterwards and a Service career makes it well worth while. The RAF has come a very long way in terms of equal opportunity for all races and especially career paths for women, in the 100 years since the Controllers, Administrators and Members of 1918!

THE 50 AND 61 SQUADRONS' ASSOCIATION

50 and 61 Sqns were both flying the Lancaster based at RAF Skellingthorpe between 1942 and 1945. They worked so well together that in June 1945, OC 50 Sqn, the charismatic Wg Cdr Jimmy Flint, suggested they gathered again at in 12 months time. They duly did and a detail from this first reunion is below, Sadly we do not have the names, save one, but we believe Bill Reid VC to be the prominent figure in the front centre. It was always believed that the first reunion was at the Cock Inn on Fleet street, But research of the archive reveal that the first reunions were at the New Inn on Westminster Bridge Road, they moved to the Cock Inn in 1954.



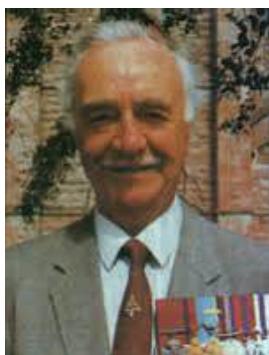
Detail from the First 50 and 61 Sqn Reunion at the New Inn, June 1946
(Thanks to the late Capt Roy Day (arrow top right), with 2 of his crew)

Thanks to Jimmy, the reunions were such a success that there has been an annual reunion ever since. The legendary one-armed ACM Sir Gus Walker (OC 50 Sqn Dec 1940) and our first Permanent President, was a regular attendee in London. Some years later, MRAF Sir Michael Beetham (50 Sqn pilot 1943-44), and our second Permanent President, was a regular attendee in Lincoln. Our Third and Final Permanent President, AVM Nigel Baldwin (OC 50 Sqn 1977-79), attends our annual reunions, with his wife Jenny. They will both be at our final reunion event: the dinner at the IBCC on 9 Jun.

50 AND 61 SQUADRONS' WARTIME VETERANS



Operation Failed to Return
Memorial, Birchwood



Bill Reid VC



Reg Freeth; Jamie Barr DFC

The Association is immensely proud of our wartime veterans; sadly too many are no longer with us. But we are blessed with a few remaining stalwarts who hold a very special place among us. We depict many of our veterans, for whom we have photographs, that have played such a large part in the Association's history since "Operation Failed to Return"; the unveiling of the Birchwood Memorial, on 3 June 1989.



Sir Michael and Jimmy Flint DFC GM toasting each other for Sir Michael's 90th birthday and Jimmy's 100th, in 2013. With the cakes from the Ladies of Skellingthorpe.



Bernard Fitch DFC; Sir Michael;
Ken Ruskell MBE
Instructors at RAF Syerston 1944-45



Fred Jones



Arthur Smith



Dr John Cook DFC

Wartime Veterans Attending the Annual Reunion Dinner June 2016



Rear: John Firth; Jock Crozier; Reg Payne;
Reg Freeth; Arthur Atkinson; Ted McRae.

Front: Eric Coling; James Wright DFC;
James Flowers; John Tait; Ken Johnson



Bill Jackman at Skellingthorpe 2012



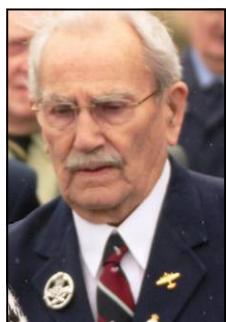
Sir Michael with
2 members of his
wartime crew:
Reg Payne (L)
(WO) and Les
Bartlett (R) (BA)



Danny Thomas; Frank Hercliffe;
Roy Davidson



Bill Drinkell DFC AFC



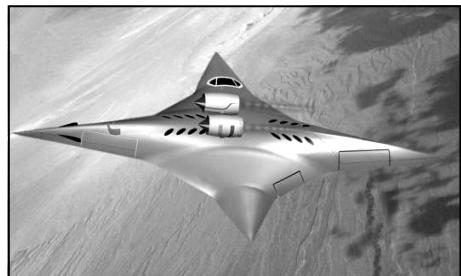
Emlyn Williams



No I Fighter Sqn RFC with the SE5a (and Sqn dog) in France - 1918



Lightning II - 617 Sqn - 2018



Shapeshifter - Adaptable aircraft - 2118?
(Acknowledgements to the University of Miami)



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