

The Estaminet Times

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HALIFAX
MILITARY HISTORY
SOCIETY

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Editor's Notes

Welcome to the Spring edition of the *Estaminet Times*. This is one of my favourite times of the year. Winter is finally behind us, there's fresh greenery and spring flowers everywhere and the whole of the summer is opening up to us.

It must be energising our contributors because this edition is by far the longest we have issued. As always, we are very pleased to include the transcript of one of Peter Liddle's interviews, which this time features the world-famous sculptor, Henry Moore. The interview is fascinating for a number of reasons, not least of which is that Henry's First World War experience would seem to buck the trend, so beloved of the media, that there were only damaged souls who emerged from that war.

We are also delighted to include a comprehensive account of a very British hero, 'Ginger' Lacey, by Beryl Gallagher, leader of Bridlington U3A Local History Group and volunteer at Bridlington Harbour Heritage Museum.

None of this is to diminish the contributions of our regular stalwarts, Alan Rhodes, Ian Richardson and Rob Hamilton who again are on hand to deliver stories and insights into military and naval warfare. Without all of them this e-magazine would not be possible.

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Beached on Skeleton Coast

Ian Richardson

The story of the loss of the cargo ship "*Dunedin Star*" in 1942 is not well-known – one of numerous casualties affecting Allied merchant shipping, mainly at the hands of German U-boats, but it is an interesting tale, with a local connection.

"*Dunedin Star*" was a modern Blue Star refrigerated vessel of 13,000 tons, which usually carried frozen meat from Australia, and it had participated in running the Malta blockade in 1941. It set sail from Liverpool for Aden on 9th November 1942 with a cargo of ammunition, war matériel and foodstuff for the 8th Army and had a crew of 85 - including Second Officer Alan Carling from Halifax - and it conveyed 21 passengers. At that time, the Mediterranean-Suez Canal route was not a safe option, so it headed south via Durban, South Africa. The ship was sailing "independently" for most of the voyage, not as part of a convoy, and the crew maintained a constant lookout for enemy vessels, particularly the U-boats roaming the South Atlantic. On November 24th, whilst off the island of St. Helena, the Captain received instructions from the Admiralty to change course, and instead of heading directly to Cape Town, it headed east to hug the African coast all the way down.



MV Dunedin Star. AI enhanced and coloured

Beached on Skeleton Coast

Ian Richardson

On 29th November, at 10.30 p.m. the ship struck the Clan Alpine Shoal - a razor-sharp reef, named after a ship it had claimed - off the treacherous coast of South West Africa (nowadays Namibia) and suffered catastrophic damage. The significant water ingress meant that Captain Lee was forced to beach the ship and at 11.18 p.m. the vessel grounded 550 yards offshore in heavy breakers and began to twist and list.

The wireless operator managed to send a distress signal, which was picked up at Walvis Bay, some four hundred miles south. The crew then turned to the lifeboats, but these could not be used owing to the heavy breakers, so the small motor launch was readied. In difficult conditions, with a large swell, they managed to get the passengers into the launch and navigated through the reef to land on the beach. The exercise was repeated in very heavy seas, which damaged the launch, but over the next 24 hours 63 people were landed, leaving 43 crew members still aboard the broken vessel. Attempts to bring the remaining crew members ashore by means of a Breeches Buoy were defeated by the elements.



Skeleton Coast map

Efforts were directed at making some sort of camp, although they had little in the way of materials or supplies. A rough bivouac was made in the dunes for the first night, to avoid the worst of a sandstorm.

Beached on Skeleton Coast

Ian Richardson

Meanwhile, the South African authorities were planning a major rescue effort: a salvage tug, "*Sir Charles Elliot*," was despatched from Walvis Bay, and subsequently a minesweeper (*H.M.S.A.S. Nerine*) set off with emergency supplies, whilst cargo ships in the vicinity were diverted to help. A South African Police land rescue convoy of eight vehicles set out from Windhoek to assist those ashore, but their long journey was fraught with difficulties in a wilderness without made-up roads. A South African Air Force coastal patrol aircraft was sent on 3rd December to drop supplies on the beach, but most were destroyed on impact. The pilot of the Lockheed Ventura aircraft decided to land on the beach to rescue some survivors, but the plane's undercarriage sank into sand, and it could not take off.



Survivors on shore: AI enhanced and coloured

Beached on Skeleton Coast

Ian Richardson

The sea rescue of the *Dunedin Star's* crew was perilous but successful: the Norwegian ship *Temeraire* launched her motor boat and took ten men off *Dunedin Star*, and, despite the launch's engine failing, the Norwegian sailors managed to row for 90 minutes to get the survivors to S.S. *Manchester Division*. The following day *Temeraire's* launch took the remaining 32 crew - including Captain Lee - in four trips from *Dunedin Star* to *Sir Charles Elliot*. The tug then transferred the rescued crewmen to the *Manchester Division*, which after three days standing by in a heavy swell took them safely to Cape Town. The tug set off for Walvis Bay to resupply, but it struck the reef and foundered; the crew had to swim ashore, and all but two made it.

The plight of those on the beach was becoming worrying in the inhospitable environment, particularly with the lack of food and water. Two drums of water put overboard by *Sir Charles Elliot* were found six miles up the coast, and days later aircraft did successfully drop some food, water and emergency supplies on the beach. Other ships tried to launch rafts containing supplies but most of these were washed away. Although the beach party, under the direction of the two senior officers of the *Dunedin Star* - Chief Officer John Davies and 2nd Officer Alan Carling, managed to fashion a workmanlike camp, it was a trying experience coping with heat, sand, dehydration and minor medical problems.



Group on beach: AI enhanced and coloured

Beached on Skeleton Coast

Ian Richardson

A Court of Enquiry in Cape Town found Captain Lee culpable for the loss of his ship and he was dismissed by the Blue Star Line. Alan Carling remained with Blue Star, and he was promoted to Chief Officer with the new passenger liner *Argentina Star*, but he died in a horse-riding accident ashore in Buenos Aires in 1947. Alan Carling had been born in Halifax in 1914, the son of a master mariner. He married Eileen Hey in 1941, and she died in Halifax, in 2022, aged 104.

There is still a refrigerated cargo ship bearing the name *Dunedin Star*, although it was not built in Birkenhead but in Norway in 1994; its owners are a Polish shipping line, and it flies the flag of The Bahamas – such are the changing times in shipping.

The remote and hazardous section of the African coast where the *Dunedin Star* and many other ships over the years came to grief has now become known as the Skeleton Coast, and in these days of improved travel it is a destination promoted by Namibia Tourism Board for the more adventurous traveller.

I had the benefit of reading Alan Carling's manuscript entitled "High Adventure", his account of the drama, which his widow passed on to a member of H.M.H.S., and I am also indebted to "Dead Reckoning – the *Dunedin Star* Disaster" by Jeff Dawson (2005).



Dunedin Star
stricken:
AI enhanced
and
colourised.

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA
Citizen soldier at the Battle of Cambrai on the
Western Front, November, 1917.

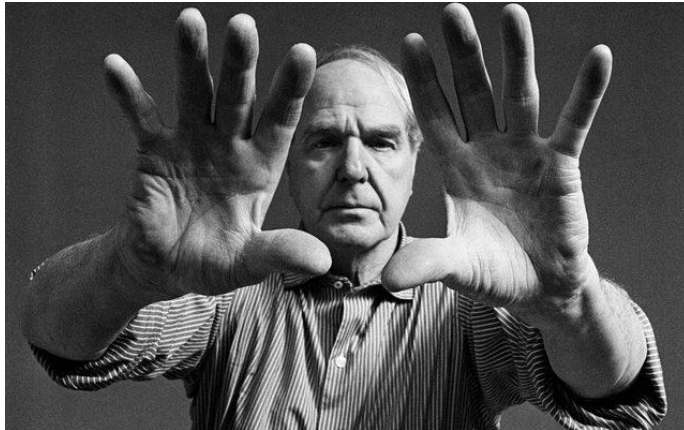
Peter Liddle

When I went to see Henry Moore in May 1980 I was certainly conscious of the privilege I had been accorded and was excited by the opportunity, but, in retrospect, I think I should have been more aware that in having for an hour and a half the undivided attention of arguably the most renowned sculptor in the world, I was interrupting his thinking or his actual work. What, creatively, may have been lost thereby, I do wonder rather uncomfortably today?

Henry Moore was warm, friendly, informal and altogether easy to interview. He shook my hand with a strength of grip which alerted me, in my own mischievous perception, to the power needed to create the holes in his monumental sculptures, such was the limitation of my vision of modern art. He did not move at all like an elderly man, his sense of humour seemed to me to be youthful and I relished his dismissive response to a question put to him about the likelihood of an artist being affronted by being surrounded by the destructive consequence of war. While I would hope not to be guilty of such intent, no words or concepts of the interlocutor were going to be put into the mouth of this man!

I remember beautiful things being in the room where the recording took place –framed drawings and paintings, shaped or natural stones in a dish. A particularly pleasant memory of this visit to Henry Moore`s home near Much Hadham in Hertfordshire, was being shown round the large garden, an open air treasure house of some of his sculptured work.

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA



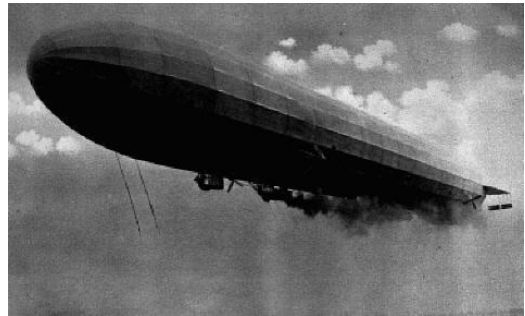
Henry Moore 1968:
John Hedgecoe

I was born in 1898 in Castleford, Yorkshire, a little coal-mining town, not a village but nearly so and with an intensely industrial atmosphere. I mean within a mile or two of the centre of the town there were three or four coal mines, two chemical works, a glass works, potteries, in fact, there is a ware called Castleford ware that is famous like Leeds ware. My father was for a period a coal miner. He was a very ambitious person and later he taught himself enough from books to pass his mining engineering and could have then qualified to be a Manager or Under-Manager but still down the coal mines. However, he had an accident to his eyes which precluded his taking a position of responsibility. . I went to school at the elementary school in Castleford, - Compass Street - first in the Infants` School. My father was ambitious for all of us. I was the seventh of a family of eight and my older three sisters and a brother had all qualified to be teachers before I was the age to go in for the local examination to go to the Grammar School. In fact I failed the first try but my father then insisted that I make an excuse that I had failed because he was trying to make me take violin lessons which I intensely disliked. The noise I made was so awful for me that when I failed the first time at trying to get the county scholarship, I said: "Well, it`s your fault Dad because you made me practice the five evenings in the week on the violin and I don't want that. I don't like it." So he let me drop the violin lessons and I took the exam again and passed but another father might not have pushed his child but as he already had four out of the family become teachers by passing exams and qualifying and going to college, this is how he intended it surely for me and I did get to the Grammar School but I knew at an early age that I wanted to be a sculptor.

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

Having heard a story of Michelangelo carving and so on, - it's a long, long, story – this fired my ideas and my father at that time was taking fortnightly parts of a children's encyclopedia which was coming out. Then eventually they were all bound into eight volumes but that took two years for him to do. Anyhow, it was just lucky that in one of them I found an article on Michelangelo and from then on, I knew that I wanted to be a sculptor. My father wanted me to go through all the training that my elder sisters and brother had done and become a teacher, but I knew I could wait. However, I did go to Grammar School. I passed the Cambridge exam which was the way to gain entry to University, but the war came in 1914 and in 1916. I was then just 18, and as for so many others, the war took over.

Oh it was exciting. I remember a Zeppelin coming over Castleford and causing great excitement late one night. We could see it. We were all out. I was about fifteen or sixteen. Now I had a teacher, a very good one, and a marvelous person really, and he was a conscientious objector, which was very brave.



Zeppelin

It took much more bravery to be a conscientious objector than just go with the crowd and join up. I admired him a great deal and he recognised that I could draw a little better than the average and he encouraged me and got me to design things for the school - the "set-up" of a new timetable, things like that and, oh well, teachers have been in my life a very important factor. He was one, and also in the Grammar School was the art mistress who was the daughter of a French mother and an English father, and she had been to art school. She encouraged me a great deal. On Sunday afternoons I was asked to go up and have tea and was shown the studio or a colour magazine or whatever it was. On the whole, teachers have been of tremendous importance to me.

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

By 1916, when I was seventeen, I was going on to be a teacher. and I was a student teacher. A lot of the teachers had joined up, and I was teaching in one of the elementary schools full-time. It should have only been part-time, but the war circumstance determined otherwise. I remember the girls used to play me up like anything - it was a mixed school - because they would do all sorts of silly things and pretend to cry and, being a boy of seventeen, I couldn't keep order at all. However, I went back to the same school when I came out of the Army in 1919 when I was demobilized, and, until I went to art school, I was teaching again in the same school and then it was easy. I mean I had already been a bayonet instructor, and I had been in the Army, so, then I knew that you just pick out the one that looks like a bit of trouble and you make a fool of him or her and then they don't do it again. Yes, it's simple, but you have got to learn it.



Wheldale Colliery: Castleford

Back to 1916; my father again thought all the time of his children, and in my case, he didn't want me to join, to be called up when I was eighteen and a half. You weren't called up until you were 18 and 6 months but when I was only 18 and 2 or 3 months, he began to think and advised me that if I waited until I was called up I would be put into the local regiment, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and I wouldn't have any experience with people different from Yorkshire people of the same kind and so on. He found out that there were regiments that one could join at eighteen and he gave me the names of three and sent me to London. The first time I ever went to London.

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA



Civil Service Rifles 15th London Regiment

One of them was the Honorable Artillery Company, the other one was the Artists Rifles which he put on his list because I had told him that I wanted to be an artist anyhow, and he said, you will probably get experience there and the other one was the Civil Service Rifles.



Cap Badge

I went to the Honorable Artillery Company. They had a waiting list of over a year which would mean that I would be called up before that time. I then went to the Artists Rifles. They had a waiting list, not quite as long as the Honorable Artillery Company, but it would still mean that I would be called up before they had a vacancy. However, the Civil Service Rifles, the 15th London Regiment, said there was no waiting list and so I joined up before I was eighteen and was called-up. That is why I got in the Army so early and was in France earlier than would otherwise have been the case. I was the youngest in the Regiment.

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

In the trenches the older people gave me their rum rations just to see me drunk. You can imagine that to begin being the youngest I was given all the little jobs too that came along. For instance, the officer told me some time before the Battle of Cambrai, when we were in a quiet part of the line, that the battalion was going to be relieved and that I had to act as guide to the battalion coming in to relieve us. For some distance behind our position the communication ways were below ground for safety. Well, I don't have a very good sense of direction so when he said: "Moore, you go and meet them and bring them in. Will you remember the way?" I didn't tell him that I couldn't. I said: "Can I start out now to find the way back because I might have got it wrong and I spent the whole morning finding the way back to the relief point that they would be coming to, chalking every corner with a little cross with my bayonet so that when I was coming back I could see the cross in the corner, otherwise I would be so ashamed if I couldn't find the way back and was leading the relief lot and taking them wrongly,



Bundesarchiv, Bild 104-0060
Foto: o. Ang. | 1917 November - Dezember

A British Tank at Cambrai 1917

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA



British soldier WW1 with Gas Mask

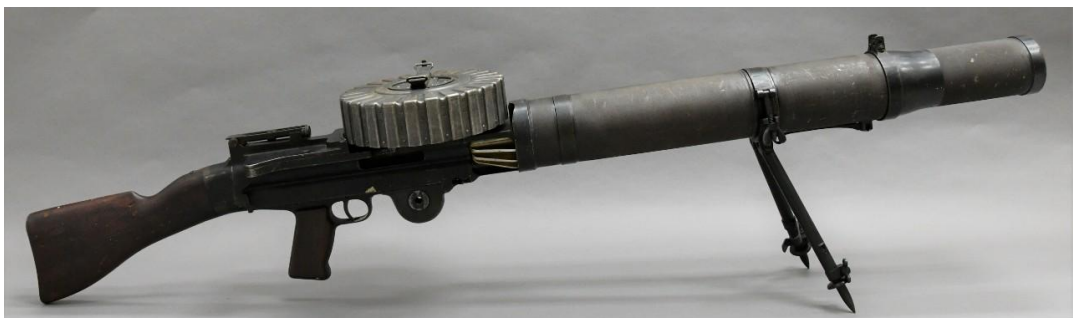
In November 1917 we were moved to Cambrai for the offensive there. You have asked me whether we did any preliminary training with tanks and the answer is no. I remember that the Colonel of the Regiment led us over the field with his baton and we did it just as though we had done it on Wimbledon Common where I had been trained and we advanced fifty yards, went to ground, flat down, and advanced another stage until we got to the spot required. Actually, nothing happened much because the advance to Cambrai was over-done, took ground too far ahead and nothing much happened until we got to the part we were halted at. Then the next day a real German counter-attack began, first with a bombardment which began I think in the night and the next morning it continued. The field we had reached was all grass completely. Within a day you didn't see a blade of grass with the shells that had fallen. They had begun to mix gas shells with high explosives. Although we had gas masks, we didn't know that the shell that dropped just behind us was a gas shell because of the noise of the other ones. Until you smelt it slightly and when you smelt something or saw the effects and could recognise that there was gas around, then you put your gas mask on, but you didn't like the gas mask being on. It's uncomfortable. You didn't like it, so, every now and then, you would see whether it was clear by lifting your gas mask and sniffing a bit and if it was still there you would put it back on

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

Well, this bombardment of gas shells mixed with ordinary shells went on for three days. You didn't know it but a lot of us had been gassed. We were also being strafed by low-flying aircraft. I was a Lewis gunner, Number One of a Lewis gun team. I asked the officer of our platoon if I could take the Lewis gun and try to fire at them. He said I could: "If you go further away from us because we don't want them to pinpoint you near us. If you go a good 100 yards away so you can draw their fire, that's alright if you want to do it. Well, I fired for I don't know how long but a long time. I didn't hit an aircraft. Even if the target is big its vulnerable parts are few and small. and it flies past you at I don't know what miles an hour.

So, I fired for nearly a whole day as they came over. Nothing ever happened because it was really very difficult. Anyhow, we went on for three days like this and then we were relieved. We had suffered a good many casualties. After having had a rest, we were told by an officer that those who had their voice affected in any way were to report sick to the casualty clearing area because we weren't going fully to the rear areas and I was one of those. My voice had all gone. It still is a little affected. We were marched actually back to a casualty clearing station which, of course, made the gassing a little bit worse because it was circulating. I mean if you have got gas in your system, to have exercise is the worst thing because it is spreading you know, circulating.

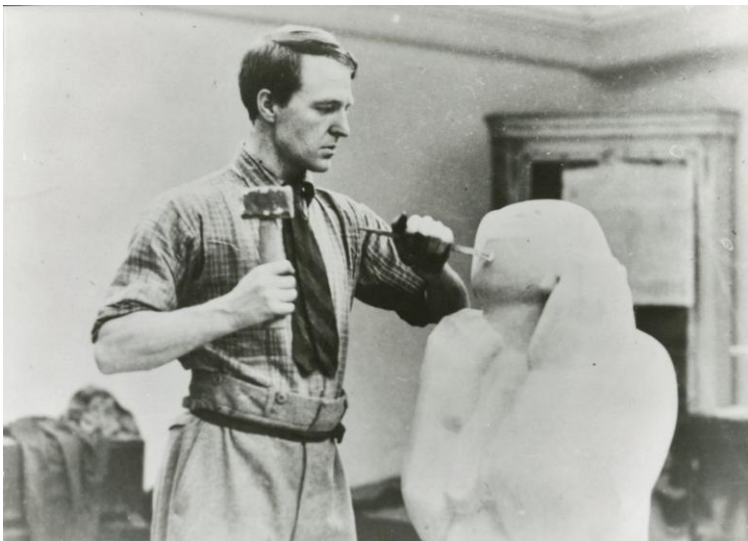
Anyhow, it meant that when we got to the casualty clearing station we were sent back and I was marked for home, a "Blighty" case.



British Lewis Gun

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

You have asked me whether, in your words, a "sensitive young man who wanted to be an artist was not affronted by what he had seen on the Western Front, his whole artistic spirit rejecting what he had experienced?" In that sense I wasn't a sensitive young man. I meant to win a medal. It's a very different thing. I meant to do the best I could to win a medal. I wanted to come back as a medal winner, that is not, I mean because one believed in the cause of England. I remember seeing my first dead body and it was a shock. I didn't know that the person was dead until I went up and shook him and he fell over. I was a boy of eighteen and I meant to win a medal. So it wasn't this kind of super sensitivity. This is what lots of the young people of that period felt. They weren't highly sensitive. I mean it was an adventure. I enjoyed it all. Perhaps I should add that I had not left the young artist behind me in England. Oh no, I didn't. I did drawings and so on in my spare time, especially when I got back to England as a convalescent, as a "Blighty" case, a stretcher case. After three or four weeks in hospital somewhere in Wales, I was allowed to get up and there I was drawing whenever I could. I mean people today don't understand what kind of response there was to that war, that first world war. The patriotism of everybody was unbelievable. I was very pleased when they said: "Oh you are a Blighty case" but no, for me it was all a big adventure.



Henry Moore:
Early days at work as
a sculpture

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

Well, what happened was, after being in hospital in Wales, we were sent back to the Regiment as a convalescent and one morning we were all on parade and it was a Physical Training parade and the officer was looking on and he said:" Moore, fall out" and there were two of us and after this had happened he advised us that they were picking ten out of the Regiment to go for instruction at Aldershot to become PT instructors. Physical training, and I went. There was a party of twenty of us in the class. I think only about ten passed. The course was intense and very tough and only about half of them qualified. Some got twisted ankles and so on because you were doing so much. They were testing you. . They were only taking the real fit tough ones and I finished the course. Came back to the Regiment and was very pleased. I was given a stripe, made a Lance Corporal and the PT instructor in our Regiment, and I think everywhere, we PTI's were specially treated because we were meant to sort of look especially smart and perky. You were allowed not to have puttees, so you had a crease down your trousers. You had a white sweater instead of the ordinary khaki, so you were a bit out of the ordinary.



British PT Instructors WW1

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA



Bayonet training

After a period, I was chosen to go on a special course in bayonet training, and I became a specialist in bayonet instruction which again was something that was a cut above the ordinary - just physical jerks, because the bayonet instructors strutted around even more, but being young like that I certainly took to it. I mean a sculptor has to be a physical type.

It's no good somebody wanting to be a sculptor and not being so. Michelangelo undoubtedly worked harder than any coal miners ever worked in England. I mean the carving and the hours that he would put in. I work much harder physically at my sculpture than ever my father worked. In fact, I remember my mother when she was getting on for eighty, coming down to me and my wife in Kent for a month in the Summer and sitting out in the sun and watching me carve and she said: " Henry, why on earth did you choose to do that? Your Dad had to work, but why did you ever choose to?" She saw me physically working away and she thought that the one thing about education and going to Grammar School and everything else, was to avoid physical labour, but you can't. I mean if a person doesn't like physical exercise and doesn't like using his strength and fighting the stone and so on, it's no good him being a sculptor. It would be stupid.

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

I was not on this course until the end of the war. I was being sent along with a whole lot back to France and I was given leave and I went up to Yorkshire, to Castleford and, believe it or not, when I came back in the train to report at Wimbledon where the Regiment was stationed, on the train I heard that the Armistice had been signed and when I got to London that night all London was celebrating. I didn't get back to the Regiment until the next day. I think it was The Cafe Royal that I went to. If not, it might have been a Lyons Corner House. People were dancing on the tables. All the girls were kissing the boys. It was tremendous especially for a soldier and I got back to the Regiment the next morning and they still carried on and sent us out to France because I had been on leave to go to France and they couldn't change all the arrangements and so this contingent from the Regiment that I had been chosen to go with, we still went back to France.

We went up to the front-line and there we were, because although the Armistice had been signed, nobody knew it was all absolutely over for sure. So, we carried on just for a period and in any case, they just couldn't simply disband the whole Army.

Fortunately being a student, I was in the first batch of ten to be demobilized from my Regiment and we had such a send-off from the rest of the Regiment in France because we were the first batch to go. It was marvelous but being young and also being a student, because I was still a student teacher and my education had been interfered with or interrupted, it was especially marvelous. When I got back, this wonderful art teacher at the Grammar School had found that there were new Army grants to help people in my position. I applied for one and I said to my father, having then being away nearly two years: "Dad I don't care what you say about going to University, I am going to Art School."

HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

Now as for bayonet instruction, in the main it's all a game when you are teaching and one rejoiced in the kind of physical display doing the thing that you set out to do and we had a course, a bayonet course, in which it was set up with sacks which were meant to be bodies which hung from a bar or in the trench and this course was about 100 or 200 yards long and all the soldiers who were training had to do this course and I remember having to take a young Second Lieutenant who had just joined and was a very gentle type in that kind of way, not a pansy type, but I would have said a very sensitive sort. I remember taking him, this is a funny little story, and he wouldn't do anything properly at all really. I mean you had to pretend ferocity. It was like acting on the stage. You had to act as though you were a violent soldier and he couldn't do it. I took him over and said: "Look, that's no good when you go there (France), you must jam the thing in and say "You bugger" or whatever. I mean you have got to swear. So, I said: "Come on, we'll do it again." I took him to the sack again and he jumped at it hard. but I was following and when he got to the sack he said: "Bother you, Bother you." I couldn't get him to say a swear word. I couldn't get him to do it.



HENRY MOORE OM CH FBA

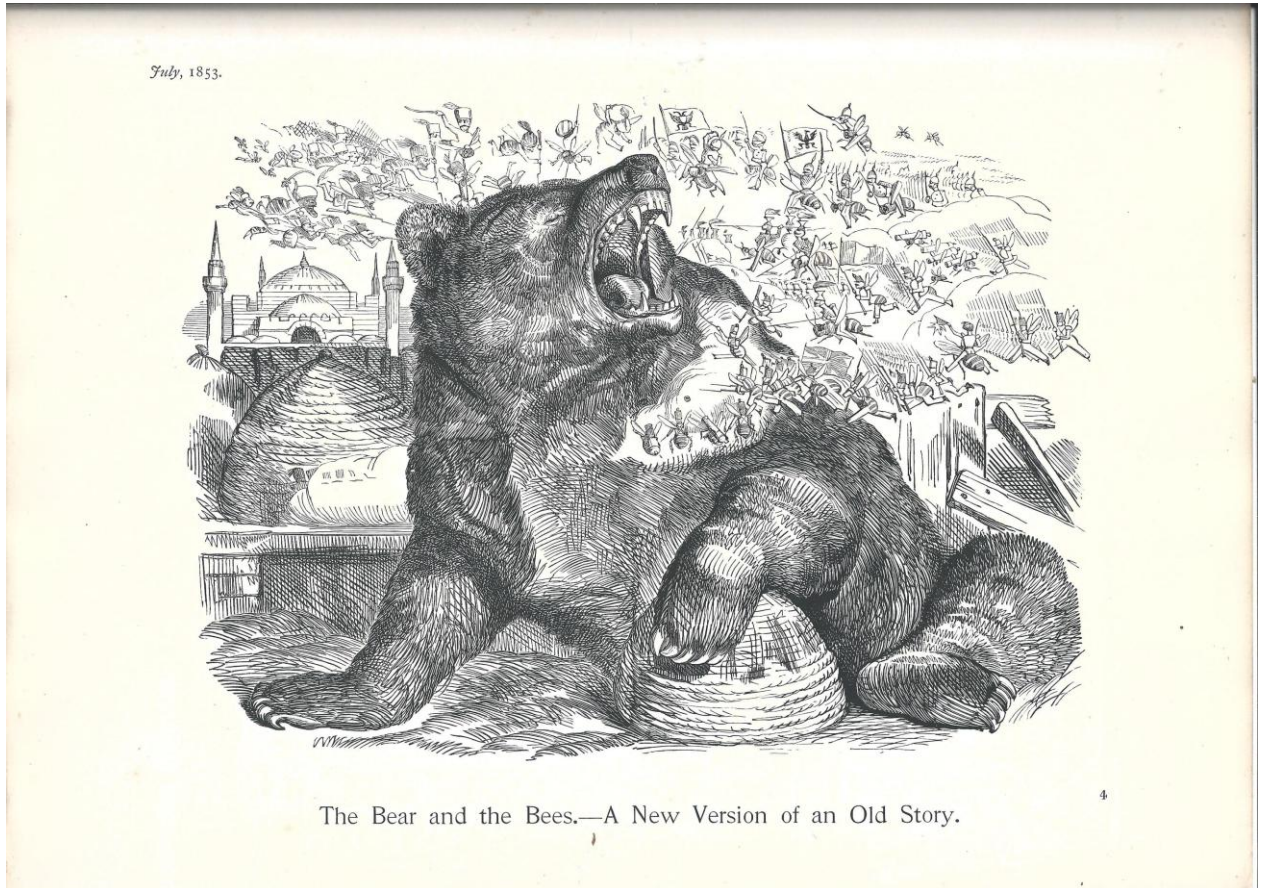
I wasn't going to be thwarted in what I wanted to do and so in that sense the war had been a great help in my career, and I wouldn't be without that experience. I wouldn't be without those two years or whatever it was. Of course, I wouldn't. I don't see how anybody can do without any of their experiences. Whatever experiences you have, they are part of your life and to imagine not having them, how can you? It isn't a period that I disliked. No, I enjoyed it enormously.



Henry Moore in his studio

The Bear and the Bees: Classic Cartoon of Russian Aggression

Alan Rhodes



This cartoon by Sir John Tenniel originally appeared in the Punch edition of July 1853. A collection of his cartoons was published in 1901 each with a short explanatory note (although it was recognised that these were largely unnecessary for contemporary readers!)

The Bear and the Bees

Alan Rhodes

The note for "The Bear and the Bees" reads:

"The invasion of Turkey by the Russian forces had been met by an unexpected resistance, and had aroused the opposition of the European Powers"

The Russo-Turkish/Ottoman wars began in 1568 and continued intermittently until 1918. This particular phase commenced in July 1853 when Russia invaded and occupied the Ottoman Balkan provinces along the Danube. Britain and France later declared war on Russia in support of the Ottoman Empire. The Russians ultimately withdrew from the provinces in 1854 under Austrian pressure, and the conflict shifted primarily to the Crimean Peninsula.

With British and French participation in support of Turkey the 19th century Crimean War ended unfavourably for the Russians, with the Paris peace of 1856.

Sir John Tenniel's Russian bear is surrounded by ferocious bees representing the hostile reaction to Russia's aggression. His caption "A New Version of an Old Story" might well be applicable to present events.

Reoccupation of the Rhineland 1936

Rob Hamilton

The defining event of March 1936 was Adolf Hitler's decision to send German soldiers to the Rhineland in direct violation of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles and the 1925 Locarno Pact, both of which Britain had guaranteed. German troops entered a zone designed to protect France's eastern border. For Britain, the move raised a critical question: whether it was willing to enforce treaty obligations through military action. The answer was a quiet but decisive "no". Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's government refused French calls for a military response, arguing that Germany was reoccupying territory many Britons regarded as rightfully German. Public opinion was central to this decision. Memories of the First World War remained vivid, and there was little appetite for another conflict over what appeared to many as a technical breach of international law. Across Cabinet and Parliament, negotiation was favoured over confrontation.

This stance weakened the system of collective security Britain had helped establish after 1918. Although urgent talks took place, Britain insisted that the matter be handled through the League of Nations rather than using force. By acting as mediator rather than enforcer, Britain signalled that treaty guarantees were limited by political reality and domestic constraints.

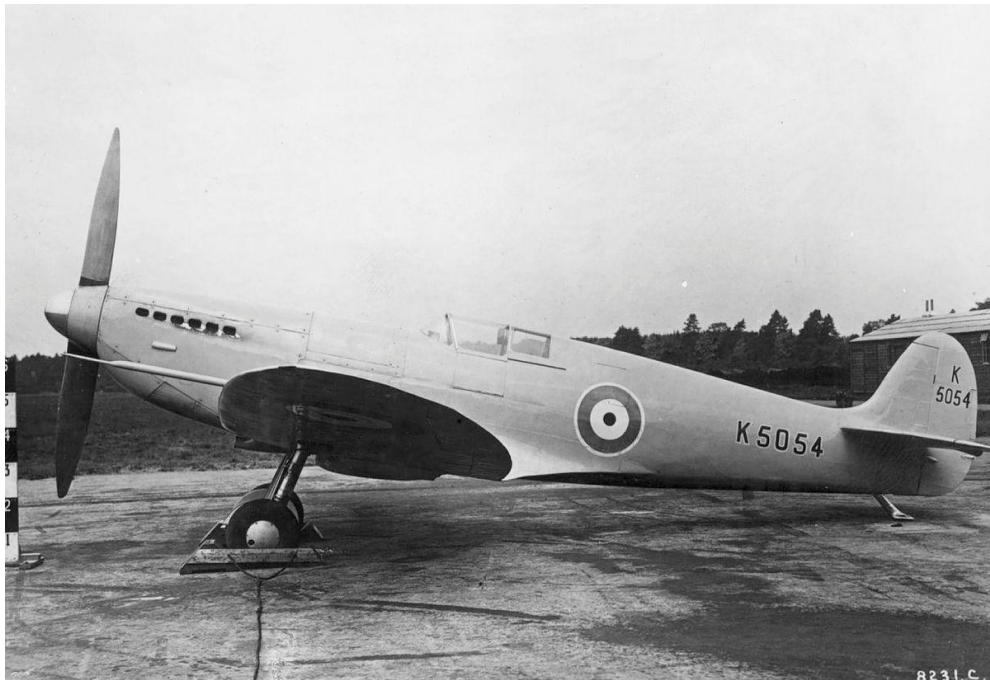


1936.
Adolf Hitler stands in
his open car while
driving through
Cologne.

Reoccupation of the Rhineland 1936

The crisis also intensified debate about rearmament. The government had already begun cautious expansion of the Royal Air Force, driven by widespread fear of air attack. The Rhineland episode underlined Britain's military weakness and the extent to which it restricted diplomatic options. Although ministers continued to speak publicly in favour of peace, rearmament was increasingly recognised as unavoidable.

Confidence in international institutions was further eroded. The League of Nations had failed to prevent Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, and sanctions against Mussolini were widely seen as ineffective. Italy's alignment with Germany during the Rhineland crisis deepened doubts about the League's authority. Moral pressure and legal agreements, it was clear, meant little without the power to enforce them.

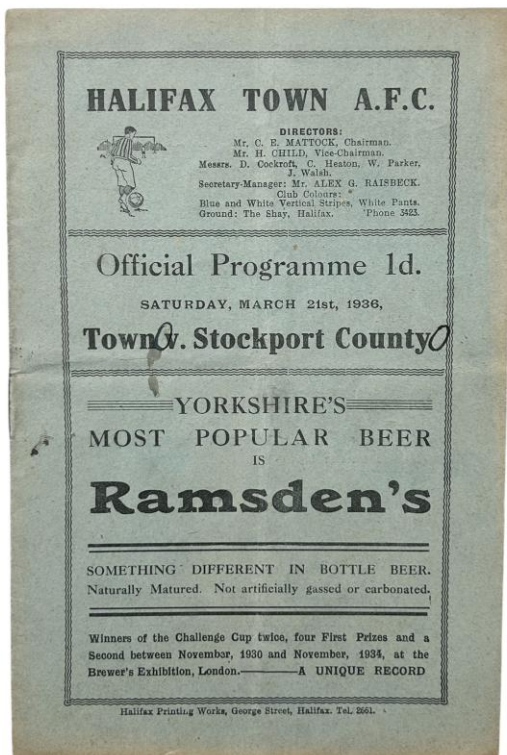


Prototype Spitfire

Reoccupation of the Rhineland 1936

Later in the month, Hitler sought to legitimise his actions through a plebiscite and Reichstag election. Although the reported results were treated sceptically in Britain, they reinforced the impression that Hitler enjoyed broad popular support, reducing hopes that internal opposition might restrain Nazi aggression.

Yet while European diplomacy grew more precarious, daily life in Britain continued largely unchanged. Attention remained focused on work, leisure, and sport rather than foreign policy. On 21 March, Halifax Town drew 0–0 against a robust Stockport County before a modest crowd, while the town's rugby league side lost to Keighley in a hard-fought and ill-tempered match watched by 7,000 spectators.



Official Programme of Halifax Town
AFC

These ordinary events illustrate how distant the Rhineland crisis felt to many Britons. Local concerns and familiar routines mattered more than events hundreds of miles away. At the same time, this domestic outlook shaped government policy: a population scarred by war and economic hardship was deeply reluctant to risk another conflict.

In retrospect, March 1936 marked a turning point. Britain chose negotiation and delay over confrontation, a decision understandable at the time but one that weakened European security and emboldened Hitler. While life went on much as usual at home, the foundations of peace were quietly eroding. The Second World War was just three and a half years away.

First published in the Grapevine Magazine's Back to the Past 90 Years Ago feature

The Magazine of the Halifax Military History Society

Ginger Lacey

The Pilot Who Shot-Down the Heinkel that Bombed Buckingham Palace

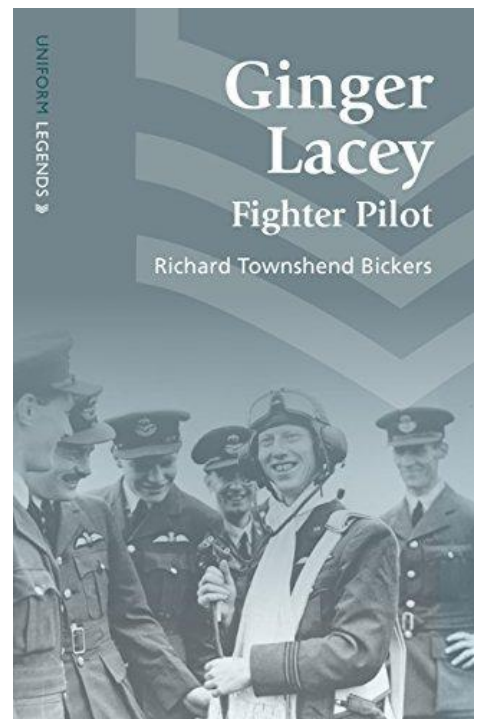
Beryl Gallagher

Ginger Lacey was born James Harry Lacey on 1st February 1917 in Wetherby, West Yorkshire. James's father was a farmer and expected his son to follow in his footsteps and be a farmer too.

When James was 16 years old, he told his father he wanted to be a pilot in the RAF. Dad was not best pleased and said "the RAF is a short way to suicide. When you leave school son, go to an agricultural college and I'll take a farm for you".

By the 1930s flying was getting exciting! In 1931 Amy Johnson, a Yorkshire lass, became the first woman to fly solo in a Gypsy Moth, to Australia and an RAF team won the Schneider Trophy for Britain.

The Schneider Trophy was pioneered by Jacques Schneider in 1912. He was a French balloonist and flying enthusiast. This was a race and the prize was £1,000. His idea was to encourage the development of the seaplane. He maintained that seaplanes could take off and land on a stretch of water whereas land planes needed the construction of concrete airstrips on which to take off and land. Hornsea Mere was a seaplane base during WWI for the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). Flamborough's South Landing was an RNAS base for repairing damaged seaplanes. In 1918 the RNAS joined with the Royal Flying Corps to become the Royal Air Force — but that is another story for another time. The Schneider trophy was held 12 times between 1913 and 1931, and flying was becoming a popular pass-time for the rich.



Book Cover

Ginger Lacey

As James was about to leave school he suddenly came to the conclusion that being a farmer was a life sentence. He said "It's a seven day a week job, twenty-four hours a day. When the farm needs you, you've got to be there."

James left school having passed the School Certificate with credits and not wanting to be a farmer and not having his dad's permission to join the RAF, he took an apprenticeship as a student chemist only because the lesson he really enjoyed at school was chemistry.

In 1933 two events occurred which were to change his life:

1. There was a general depression, and farming was at rock bottom
2. His father died and all the farm stock was sold.

James continued in his three-year apprenticeship which he did not enjoy and when, at last, he was 19 and out of his indentures, he left the pharmacy for good.

Still wanting to be a pilot he asked his mother's permission to apply for the RAF Volunteer Reserve. His mother said "yes" because she did not think he would pass the medical. Two of James's friends, had applied, and failed the medical and they were big strapping forwards from James's rugby club. James was a skinny, but fast, winger. He passed the medical and he passed the entry exam and was posted to Scone in Scotland with 29 others for flight training.



The Blackburn B-2 was a biplane side-by-side trainer aircraft designed and produced by the British aircraft manufacturer Blackburn Aircraft. On 10 December 1931, the prototype B-2 performed its maiden flight at Brough. It had excellent manoeuvrability and responsive flying controls, and was a relatively forgiving aircraft in flight. While Blackburn had ambitions to sell the B-2 as a military trainer, the only air force to adopt it was the Royal Air Force. (Shuttleworth Collection)

Ginger Lacey

James took to flying like a duck to water and was the first of his group to fly solo in a Tiger Moth and at the end of the course he was assessed "above average". Six weeks later he returned home to continue flying at weekends at Brough where he flew two seater side by side Blackburn B2s. His mother proudly told her friends that Jim was now a qualified pilot.

During 1938, he was now 21 years old, he took an instructors' course at Grimsby and gained an instructor's endorsement on his licence. His next goal was to be an instructor at Yorkshire Flying Club.

Now James was a quiet and polite young man, but he had a mischievous streak and a sense of humour. He wasn't tall, he was slim with pale complexion, blue eyes and blondish hair.

He went to see the secretary at the Flying Club and told her he wanted to be a flying instructor. She looked him up and down. She was having trouble getting through to him.



The Tiger Moth is arguably the world's most famous training aircraft. It was originally developed from the earlier Gipsy Moth. The first DH82 Tiger Moth flew for the first time on 26 October 1931 from Stag Lane Aerodrome, not far from Hendon and the current RAF Museum London. A few months later the Tiger Moth entered service at the RAF Central Flying School at RAF Upavon, Wiltshire. With the pre-war expansion of the RAF there was a great need for training aircraft. This led to a gradual increase in numbers. During the Second World War it provided the majority of RAF pilots with their elementary flying training. Eventually, over 8,800 Tiger Moths were built. (Photograph: Australian War Memorial Collection)

Ginger Lacey

“So you want to join the club?”

“In a way, yes” he replied.

“To learn to fly” she stated.

“No. I want to be an instructor”

She was getting impatient “Yes, yes of course but first you will have to learn to fly yourself won’t you?”

“But I can fly”

“How old are you? 16? 17? When have you had time to fly?”

“I’m 21” said James politely and put his log-book on the table.

She looked through it and saw he had 250 flying hours and was a qualified instructor. She picked up the telephone and spoke to the Chief Flying Instructor. He got the job. Over the following months Lacey flew many air miles ferrying civilians in different aircraft including the Hawker Hurricane.



Hurricane Mk I fighters (coded SD-N and SD-T) of RAF No. 501 Squadron were photographed at Betheniville, France, in May 1940 during the Battle of France. These aircraft featured early war camouflage and were part of the Advanced Air Striking Force before retreating to the UK.

Ginger Lacey

On 3 September 1939, the Prime Minister broadcast over the radio that the country was now at war with Germany. All RAF Reservists were expecting to be called up, and Sergeant Lacey was instructed to report for orders in Hull. He was sent to 501 Squadron which was based at Filton outside Bristol. 501 Squadron had only been issued with Hurricanes a few days beforehand, and Lacey was one of the few who could fly them. Within a month the whole squadron was operational.

Operations consisted of patrols over the Bristol Channel looking for German aircraft and submarines. After dark there was night flying practice. Lacey's mischievous streak came into play. He was asked by the Adjutant, who was a regular officer and a Qualified Flying Instructor from Central Flying School "How much Service night flying have you done sergeant?"

"None Sir" Lacey replied with his young innocent expression.

"Well, I'll give you a spot of duel in the Hart Trainer."

The Adjutant was smug with satisfaction thinking to himself he was going to teach this green youngster night flying technique. After a couple of circuits and landings the Adjutant told Lacey to try a landing.



The Hawker Hart is a British two-seater biplane light bomber aircraft that saw service with the RAF. It was designed during the 1920s by Sydney Camm and manufactured by Hawker Aircraft.

The Hart was a prominent British aircraft in the inter-war period, but was obsolete and already side-lined for newer monoplane aircraft designs by the start of the Second World War, playing only minor roles in the conflict before being retired

Ginger Lacey

“Very good sir” and Lacey began his approach. An instant later the officer was clutching the rim of his cockpit for support as he was thrown steeply to one side. Sergeant Lacey was ‘side slipping’ off his excess height. They touched down gently and the Adjutant burst angrily:

“What the heil do you mean by side slipping at night Sergeant? Your first attempt at night flying and you behave like a barn-storming circus pilot. I've a good mind to put you on a charge”.

Lacey replied, “But I always side slip extra height sir”.

“Not at night!”

“Yes sir, at night sir. Always sir.”

“But you told me you hadn't done any night flying Sergeant”.

“No sir. You asked me if I had any service night flying. I've got over a hundred hours of night flying on civil aircraft”. This was considerably more than the 26 year old Adjutant.

The squadron was moved to Tangmere, closer to London, and the next few months were spent training in formation flying and weaponry while Hitler came closer to taking over Europe. First Poland, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. 501 Squadron was posted to France to support the French Air Force against the Luftwaffe.

Ginger Lacey



Pilots of No. 501 Squadron on airfield somewhere in Northern France in 1940. James 'Ginger' Lacey, who would go on to be the second-highest scoring RAF fighter pilot of the Battle of Britain, is part of the group.

No. 501 Squadron was one of the squadrons of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, part of the volunteer reserve part of the RAF. At the start of the Second World War in September 1939, the squadron was based at RAF Filton, near Bristol. When the German attack on France and the Low Countries brought an end to the 'Phoney War', the squadron became part of the Advanced Air Striking Force and moved to France where it saw extensive action, stationed at airfields as Bétheniville, Anglure, Le Mans and Dinard. After the retreat from France through Saint Helier, Jersey, its battle-hardened pilots were reorganised at RAF Croydon and then moved on to RAF Middle Wallop and later RAF Gravesend (now Gravesend Airport). It subsequently served at RAF Kenley, south London, commanded by Squadron Leader Harry Hogan, until 17 December 1940 by which time the squadron had claimed 149 enemy aircraft destroyed. Success came at a high cost; in addition to the heavy losses suffered in France, the squadron lost 19 pilots killed during the Battle of Britain, more than any other squadron.

Ginger Lacey

Germany had amassed a large air force, and the Royal Air Force was greatly outnumbered and had a huge area to cover. They were sent to fly reconnaissance patrols and night operations. They had a tough time in France living under canvas in crude conditions. They were flying two patrols a day and they were exhausted

On the rare occasions that they had free time they explored the French towns and enjoyed the bars, the girls and using the few French words they knew from their French lessons at school. They fought in many successful air battles and Lacey was awarded the Croix de Guerre.

With the defeat of France the unit returned to Blighty dispirited. The evacuation of Dunkirk had been completed days earlier and the curtain was coming down on operations in France. Many friends did not come back. They had only been in France for five weeks, but it seemed like a lifetime.

One compensation he recalled was that the NAFFI was evacuated just before his squadron took off and had to abandon its stock. The Hurricanes returned to England carrying as many bottles of brandy and cartons of cigarettes as could be stuffed into every corner. Lacey recalled "It provided some of the cheapest drinking and smoking I have ever enjoyed."

Lacey and his Squadron were stationed at Croydon Airfield and Lacey recalled that the Greyhound pub was nearby. After two weeks of uneventful patrols the squadron moved to Middle Wallop in Hampshire and were put on Night Operation Readiness.

The Battle of Britain is the name given to the campaign in which the Royal Air Force defended the United Kingdom against large scale attacks by Nazi Germany's Luftwaffe. It took place between 10th July and 31st October, 1940.

Ginger Lacey



Hurricane Mk I L2045 SD-A of No 501 Squadron RAF loaded onto a railway wagon during the final evacuation from France 1940. The Aircraft was damaged on 15 May when Sergeant Proctor force landed it safely, after which it was returned by rail and sea to the England, eventually ending its service career in the Fleet Air Arm in May 1943.

Ginger Lacey



A formation of He 111s, circa 1940:

The Heinkel He 111 was an airliner and medium bomber designed by Siegfried and Walter Günter at Heinkel Flugzeugwerke in 1934. Through development, it was described as a wolf in sheep's clothing;

Due to restrictions placed on Germany after the First World War prohibiting bombers, it was presented solely as a civil airliner, although from conception the design was intended to provide the nascent Luftwaffe with a heavy bomber.

More available!!!

See: https://www.worldwarphotos.info/gallery/uk/raf/hurricane/#google_vignette

The Germans began sending as many as a hundred bombers at a time. Our Air Force was not as large as the German Air Force, but the development of the radar early warning system gave the RAF the advantage of knowing where the German planes were heading to.

Here is what Lacey recalls as an amusing incident:

Letters of the Day was a code of identification of flashing lights which pilots identified themselves by. He said "After taking off one night on night patrol I spotted a Heinkel 111 caught in the searchlights 2 miles ahead and went after it. Much to my surprise the searchlights at once switched over to my Hurricane and ten seconds later the anti-aircraft guns opened fire on me. Blinded by the searchlights, swearing at the gunners and searchlight crews I lost the Heinkel. Landing back at base I intended to grab the first soldier I saw and chop him into small pieces".

Ginger Lacey



An He 111E in Luftwaffe service, 1940. The early variants had a conventional, stepped cockpit and the wings had a curved front edge: Bundesarchiv

“Then I found that the time was past midnight and the Colours and Letters of the Day had changed since I took off.” He had, therefore, flashed the wrong colours.

If a plane was shot down or came down in the sea owing to engine failure, with only a 'Mae West' life jacket to keep him afloat, a pilot could die of hyperthermia in the cold water. It was not until a German one-man dinghy was captured that Britain was able to design a better one for the RAF.

In the 1930s Thomas Edward Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, was in the RAF serving in the Marine Craft Unit stationed in Bridlington Harbour. One of his jobs was to refit the rescue boats to make them faster and more efficient to rescue downed pilots. (But also another story for another time).

Ginger Lacey

From Middle Wallop the squadron was moved to Gravesend.

Ginger's log-book tells of continuous calls to scramble and the pilots were exhausted. Flying 6-8 times a day, week in week out. The pilots were so tired on landing that they could not even walk away from the aircraft. They just laid down under the wing and fell asleep.

Ginger dreaded the call of the tannoy, and his stomach retched and he was physically sick every time he heard the buzz of the tannoy as it was switched on. Once in the air he was fully alert and ready for action. He did not think of shooting down the enemy as killing another person. To him it was one machine against another.

Lacey recalled that "Things were getting hectic" and he was notching up the number of German aircraft destroyed, damaged, and probables. August 1940 was particularly busy and Polish pilots who had escaped from their homeland were joining the RAF. After a visit from Inspector General, Air Chief Marshal Sir Ludlow Hewitt, a party was held for Sergeant Pilot J H Lacey as it was announced that he had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal.



Hawker employees Winnie Bennett, Dolly Bennett, Florence Simpson and a colleague at work on the production of *Hurricane* fighter aircraft at a factory in Britain, in 1942. (IWM)

Ginger Lacey



501
Squadron
group
photograph

Number 501 Squadron patrolled daily, and their nerves were stretched taut waiting for the order to scramble. When the weather was too bad to fly or if they were not on Night Readiness and the day's work was done, they were lined up in their best blue along some local pub's bar and they could enjoy a normal night out. They rarely had to buy a drink.

On the 7th August Ginger went on leave. He says "I had a special reason for wanting to go back home to Wetherby then. I had not told my mother that I had been given a DFM and I wanted to be at home when it was published in the Press"

After greeting him she asked, "What are you wearing that ribbon for, Jim?" With his mischievous streak he says "I thought it would be a good idea, get me more drinks in the local pubs!"

"Well, you are not going out with that stitched on you. Take it down immediately". So, he stayed at home that evening.

"Of course, the next day the announcement was in the newspapers and I was in trouble again because I didn't want her to worry about the fact that I had ever been in any danger".

Ginger Lacey

At the end of the week, he went back and the squadron relocated to Kenley, four miles from Croydon, 13 miles south of London. They were delighted as the Women's Auxiliary Air Force was also stationed there.

After a quiet 50-minute patrol the weather deteriorated, and the squadron returned to the airfield. A few minutes later in the crew room there was a phone call from Ops asking for a volunteer to take off and look for a Heinkel which was somewhere over London but owing to the unbroken cloud everywhere in the south east, whoever goes won't be able to land and will probably have to bale out. Ginger had never baled out before, and he wondered what it was like. So he volunteered.

He was flying for two hours searching for the Heinkel when the Controller guided him eastward at 14,000 feet above solid cloud and in Ginger's words,

"I saw it, slipping through the cloud tops half in and half out of cloud, making for the coast. I didn't know where I was because I hadn't seen the ground since taking off. I dived down on him and got in one quick burst which killed his rear gunner. I knew he was dead because I could see him lying over the edge of the cockpit. The Heinkel dived into cloud and I followed him. He then turned in cloud two or three times and made one complete circle. I stayed with him and I'm quite certain he thought he had lost me or I'd stayed above the cloud. Eventually he eased his way up to the top and broke cloud presumably to see if the fighter was still hanging around. I dropped back into a position where I could open fire, the dead gunner was pulled away from his guns and another member of the crew opened up on me at the range of literally feet.



He 111P dropping bombs over Poland, September 1939
Bundesarchiv

Ginger Lacey

"I remember a gaping hole appearing in the bottom of the cockpit. The entire radiator had been shot away and I know it was just a matter of time before the engine would seize so I put my finger on the trigger and kept it there until my guns stopped firing. By that, he had both his engines on fire and I was blazing quite merrily too. I knew I was going to have to get out.

"As soon as the guns ran out of ammunition, by which time the Heinkel was diving steeply through the clouds, I left the aircraft.

"I came out of cloud in time to see my aircraft dive into the ground and explode. While drifting down, I saw various people running across the field to where it had crashed. There was one man passing almost underneath me when I was about a hundred feet up, so I shouted. This chap stopped and looked in all directions, so I shouted again 'Right above you'. He looked up and I saw that he was a Home Guard. As he saw me, he raised a double-barrelled shotgun to his shoulder and took aim. I knew it was a double-barrelled shotgun because I was looking down both barrels and they looked like twin railway tunnels!

"I shouted 'For God's sake don't shoot' and amplified it with a lot of Anglo-Saxon words that I happened to know and continued to exhort him not to shoot for the rest of my way down and added a lot more Anglo-Saxon words.

"Eventually I fell in a field and just sat there but he still kept me covered with his gun. I said Hang on a minute while I get at my pocket and show you my identity card. He put his gun down and said 'I don't want to see your identity card, anyone who can swear like that couldn't possibly be German'.



501 Squadron Badge

Ginger Lacey

"I was a little bit singed, but I had beaten the fire out on the way down, (in fact his trousers were burned off to the knees) and my face was only a bit burnt as I had pulled my goggles down."

He had come down near Leeds Castle which was the Officers' annexe of the Shorncliffe Military Hospital. Here he had an argument with a doctor who wanted to put him to bed. Ginger wanted to get back to his base to inform the squadron that he was safe, but the telephone lines were down and he couldn't get through.

"So, I told them that they must send me back. I had to get back before the squadron packed up for the day otherwise a 'Missing, believed killed' telegram would go off to my mother and I didn't want her to have that kind of shock".

The doctor told him to report sick on returning to camp but, he dismissed the ambulance at the Guard Room, put on a new pair of trousers which concealed his burns and walked to the Officers' Mess to report to his C.O. "So (he says) I was able to go straight back on readiness."

It was then he was told that the Heinkel he had just shot down had bombed Buckingham Palace.



"Now I can look the East End in the face" is a famous quote by Queen Elizabeth (the late Queen Mother) after Buckingham Palace was bombed

Ginger Lacey



King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were relaxing and enjoying some tea on the morning of the 13th when they heard a crash and a rumble. Five high explosive bombs had been dropped on the Palace by a single German raider, a Heinkel HE111.

The South Wing's Royal Chapel was struck by two of these, the inner quadrangle by a third, and the forecourt and the road between the Palace gates and the Victoria Memorial by the final two. Most of the windows on the southern and western sides of the quadrangle were blown out, and the explosions in the quadrangle burst a water main.

The Royal Chapel's interior was damaged. Four employees were hurt; one later passed away. In the halls of the Palace, some portraits were harmed.

In a letter, Queen Elizabeth recounted hearing a bomb scream and the "unmistakable whirr-whirr of a German plane."

Thankfully, no harm came to the King or Queen during the incident. Queen Elizabeth later said, "I am glad we have been bombed. It makes me feel I can look the East-End in the face'.

The RAF represented by Ginger Lacey intercepted and downed the Heinkel bomber that had carried out the strike.

The delayed-action bomb that was between the forecourt gates and the Victoria Memorial finally went off at 8.40 am the next morning. The explosion severely damaged much of the forecourt fencing around the south gate and produced a crater that was 30' by 20' and 10' deep, despite the fact that rescue teams had plenty of time to construct six-foot-high sandbag walls around the device.

A 500-kilogram delayed action explosive detonated the following day on the Northwest Terrace of the Palace. Trying to dig it out took up most of the day for Second Lieutenant G. Pringle.

The swimming pool was destroyed, the windows were broken, and a large crater was left in the grass when it exploded at 1.30 am. Home Guard Platoon Commander Thomas Williams removed another unexploded bomb from one of the Palace's restrooms and hid it beneath a tree on the lawn.

While the bombing undoubtedly shocked King George and Queen Elizabeth, it would later improve the Royal Family's standing in the eyes of the British public.

The Foreign Office recommended the King and Queen to leave the nation immediately for their own safety, particularly as it was clear the Luftwaffe could strike again. However, their unwavering defiance in the face of this threat demonstrated guts and a dedication to the United Kingdom that the public admired.

'The children won't leave unless I do', the Queen declared in a speech to the country. 'I shall not leave unless their father does, and the King will not leave the country in any circumstances, whatever'.

Ginger Lacey

Three busy days later he was shot down again. After destroying one enemy plane and damaging another he ran out of ammunition with the whole of the tail unit of his Hurricane shot off. He parachuted down and landed very close to Leeds Castle and was taken to hospital and he says, "I got a rocket from the same doctor who had seen me only three days before."

At the end of October, the Battle of Britain ended. Ginger's 18 enemy aircraft plus four probables was the highest score amongst all the Fighter Command and he was awarded a bar to his DFM.

On 15 January 1941 Sergeant Lacey became Pilot Officer James Harry Lacey. His logbook entry for that day states that "This pilot is credited with 23 victories in air combat, and his flying ability is well above average".

He hadn't been interested in a commission but then he remembered he would be entitled to £20 when discharged from the service, which goes to show you can take the boy out of Yorkshire but you can't take Yorkshire out of the boy. He was given two weeks leave to go home to Wetherby where he was given a hero's welcome and presented with an engraved silver tankard.

Hitler had given up trying to take over Britain by air combat. He had lost 2000 planes, the RAF had lost about 750. The German Blitz had begun. Hitler was now sending bombers across and dropping bombs and the fighter planes could do nothing against them.

Ginger went to London to be decorated by King George VI.

The weeks that followed were very quiet compared to the previous months, training replacement pilots, formation flying, convoy patrols. On 9 April the squadron was posted to Colerne on the outskirts of Bath. One morning the Squadron Adjutant came into the crew room and asked if anybody had flown Spitfires as there were some to collect for the squadron from Exeter. Ginger was bored and reading a magazine. Pilot Officer Lacey "Yes I've flown Spits". He had never flown Spitfires but he supposed they would not be very different to Hurricanes.

Ginger Lacey

He was flown to Exeter by a Wing Commander, and the Spitfires were lined up. But the airfield was deserted. No one to show him how to handle them. The Wing Commander asked if they were much different from a Hurricane and Ginger stammered "Nooonot really sir...." It looked as though 88 Squadron had flown away in their brand new Spitfire Mark 2s and left their old Mark 1s for 501 Squadron to pick up without a pilot to hand them over formally - which they had.

Luckily Ginger spotted a mechanic who showed him the basics, and he flew the plane back to base. He was delighted with the lightness of the Spitfire and the responsiveness compared to the Hurricane. By the end of the week all the Spitfires were back at the base and operational. He was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and in command of A flight.

Ginger had been with Squadron 501 for two years. On 18 August 1941 he was posted to No 57 Operational Training Unit at Hawarden, Flintshire as an instructor. This was too quiet for him and after a year he got his wish and was posted to 602 Squadron (City of Glasgow) at Kenley, flying Spitfires. And so, the war went on with Ginger back in action.



Spitfire H.F Mk. VII
being tested at
Langley,
1943.

Ginger Lacey

On 27 May 1942 he was promoted to Acting Squadron Leader and, on 28 September, posted to the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment at Boscombe Down.

On 30th November 1942 he was posted to No 1 Special Attack Instructors School at RAF Milfield in Northumberland.

In March 1943 he was posted overseas. He travelled by ship from Liverpool not knowing where he was going to. Also on board were 250 Wrens. Lacey says, " And the finest pair of legs of the lot belonged to a girl named Sheila, whom I got to know quite well during the trip."

He arrived in India and was posted to No 20 Squadron. One evening he was out with friends, sitting in a hotel bar next to two American flyers on the next table. The American Captain spoke in a loud voice "God-dam Limeys" Ginger and his friends pretended not to hear. The American continued "Lousy British God-dam Limeys, got yourselves into this war and we have to get you out of it" and the more he drank the louder he got and continued throwing abuse at Ginger and his friends. The American's friend apologised and said that Chuck had been hitting the bottle.

Ginger's mischievous streak came into play. He moved onto the next table and sat with the Americans and bought them drinks and more drinks and more drinks until, two hours later, Chuck was laid over the table with his arms outstretched. Ginger told his friends to help him get Chuck into a taxi and asked the driver to take them to a tattooist.

Chuck was sat in the chair, and the tattooist was told to tattoo a union jack across the American's chest. When this was done the drunken Chuck was hauled out into the street just as an American Military Police truck was passing. Ginger hailed him and said that he had found this drunken American pilot and Chuck was taken into the truck by the Military Police and taken back to the American base.

Ginger Lacey

Ginger kept in touch with Sheila, writing and meeting up whenever and wherever possible. In his own words:

“The idea of a traditional wedding attended by a horde of relations and friends did not appeal to me and I was delighted to find that Sheila felt the same. So, at the end of June, I slipped over to Coimbatore and picked up Sheila, and we went up into the hills to Kodaikanal. On 8 July, much to everyone's surprise, we walked into the club and announced that we had just got married. Nobody would believe us of course but when eventually we convinced them, they gave us a wonderful time. They insisted on giving us a bungalow to spend our honeymoon in.”

The next day he returned to his command.

On 6 November 1943, he was posted to command No 155 Squadron and then to command No 17 Squadron.

After shooting down a Japanese fighter plane on one sortie and writing his report, he was sitting in the crew room with the other pilots when a worried-looking sergeant fitter came in:



Servicing aircraft
in the Far East:

Air Ministry
Second
World_War
Official Collection

Ginger Lacey

“Excuse me Squadron Leader Lacey, sir”

“What’s your trouble Chiefy?”

“Are you sure you got that Jap sir?”

“Why are you asking?”

“Well sir it's just that you can't have hit him sir...you've only used nine rounds of cannon”,

Ginger took his time and lit a cigarette, the other pilots watched him in silence. “Oh really Flight? As many as nine? You do surprise me!”,

A roar of laughter from the other pilots and the red-faced NCO withdrew and a new Lacey story was born to go on its rounds with all the other stories.

By this time, he was well known throughout the force as a good commander. He was very strict and would only have the best flyers in his squadron. If you made a mistake you were posted to another squadron.

He was also very fair and when the squadron was not busy. he let the men borrow a truck and go into town instead of doing exercises and parades.

Ginger Lacey

He was one of the few who were in the RAF from the beginning of the war right to the end. He had been shot down nine times and each time walked away practically unscathed. He said he was just lucky. In fact, he had exceptional eyesight and the ability to identify enemy aircraft from a great distance. Lacey's medal tally was as follows:

The **Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) and Bar** for sustained courage, skill and determination while flying operationally against the enemy during the Battle of Britain in 1940. As a sergeant pilot with No. 501 Squadron, he repeatedly engaged superior enemy forces, destroying numerous Luftwaffe aircraft and continuing to fight despite being shot down or forced to land on several occasions. His first DFM recognised his early combat success and coolness under fire; the Bar, awarded later the same year, acknowledged his continued and outstanding combat record as one of the highest-scoring RAF pilots of the battle.

Before he was awarded the DFM, Lacey was Mentioned in Dispatches whilst in France in 1940 for which he received the **Croix de Guerre** from the French Government. He would have had to have permission granted to wear the Croix de Guerre in uniform, but no evidence has been found to show that permission was requested or given.

The **1939–45 Star with Battle of Britain Clasp** was awarded for operational flying during the officially defined Battle of Britain period, recognising Lacey's direct participation in the defence of the United Kingdom between July and October 1940.

The **Air Crew Europe Star with Atlantic Clasp** recognised operational aircrew service over Europe, with the clasp denoting subsequent qualifying service over the Atlantic theatre.

The **Burma Star** was awarded for operational service in the Burma campaign, reflecting Lacey's later wartime service in India and the Far East against Japanese forces.

Ginger Lacey

The **Defence Medal** recognised non-operational service in the United Kingdom during periods of enemy attack, while the **War Medal 1939–45** was granted for full-time wartime service.

The **Air Efficiency Award and Clasp** marked long, efficient service in the Auxiliary or Volunteer Reserve, and the **Coronation Medal** recognised his continued RAF service during the reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

After retiring from the RAF, he came to live at Flamborough with his wife Sheila and their three daughters where he was a popular character who always had a tale to tell. Of Flamborough he said “Flamborough is a wonderful little place. It's well over a year now since I've had to buy any fish. In this village the fishermen push a fish in at your door as they pass in the early morning on their way home from sea. They would never think of letting you know who dropped the fish in.”

He became friends with John Medforth who owned an aircraft at Grindale Flying Club and persuaded Ginger to join. He became a flying instructor and took paying visitors on short pleasure flights.

A letter from this period written by one of the Club's customers reads:

“...Time passes and I was visiting the old country from Canada, when I came upon the field where I first learned to fly - Speeton Field! What memories! Now nothing, no hangar, no clubhouse, no Austers. As a young P.O. Plonk RAF, I ran the armoury at Bempton radar Base in the early 1950s. I went to see that too — it was gutted and forlorn. I was directed to the all-new Grindale Field, home of the Bridlington Flying Club.
“At the flying club was a 150 and a 172, so I went in and asked at the desk about a flight down the coast and I was told to go and see the old bloke in the corner.

“He was all cosy in an over-stuffed chair with a huge cup of tea. He was wearing a fisherman's orange smock, grandad glasses, and an untidy moustache.

Ginger Lacey

"Hi, I'm Tony Swain from Canada and I used to fly around here. How do I get a flight?"

" Well my name is Ginger. Learned to fly in Fighter Command, so let's get going".

Big smile! "Ginger", says I "Not Thee Ginger Lacey who wrote the book and lived hereabouts?"

"The very same" says he.

"I bought a day's membership in the club for a pound and we were off arm in arm down the coast in a 150. We had a great time, me peering down at all my old haunts, Bridlington, Withernsea, Catfoss, Leven, Holmpton, Hornsea and back to Grindale.

"Too soon we were on the ground, but it was time to eat and he and his friends hauled into Bridlington to a super pub, Ye Olde Star Inn, where we quaffed best beer and munched hot meat pies.

"And that is how I flew with Ginger Lacey!"

His mischievous streak never left him. His friend John tells us "Ginger was buzzing low over the cliff top at Flamborough for the entertainment of a couple of friends on the ground. Shortly after he returned to Grindale two police officers arrived with a complaint of low flying. Ginger put his arm around one of them as he escorted them back to the police car saying "Rest assured officer the pilot responsible will be severely reprimanded".

Sadly Ginger died in 1989 aged 72 of cancer of the gullet.



Air_Force_Ensign
of the United Kingdom.

Ginger Lacey

An acknowledge is due to **Richard Townshend Bickers**, the author of *Ginger Lacey Fighter Pilot*. Illustrations were sourced from Wikipedia,

Beryl Gallagher was born in Hull, the daughter of Jim and Irene Davis. The family moved to the West Riding and Jim and Irene became Landlord and Landlady of various public houses in Leeds. In the 1960s the family moved to Halifax where Jim and Irene took over the Sportsman Hotel in Crown Street.

On retirement Beryl's parents moved to Bridlington and Beryl joined them to care for her mum and dad. She was employed at Sewerby Hall and then as a guide in a seaside attraction showcasing the history of Bridlington.

Since retiring Beryl has been leader of Bridlington U3A Local History Group and is a volunteer at Bridlington Harbour Heritage Museum.

Alan Rhodes provided the captions for the photographs.

Rob Hamilton supplied the detailed medal information