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SELECTED ABBREVIATIONS

AAFCE	Allied Air Forces Central Europe
AMLCD	Active Matrix Liquid Crystal Display
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
ATC	Air Traffic Control
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BAC	British Aircraft Corporation
BAE	British Aerospace
BATT	British Army Training Team
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
COIN	Counter Insurgency
CSOAF	Commander Sultan of Oman's Air Force
DFGA	Day Fighter Ground Attack
DOD	Department of Defense
EATS	Empire Air Training Scheme
ELAS	<i>Ellinikos Laïkos Apeleftherotikos Stratos</i> (Greek People's Liberation Army)
FC	Fighter Control
GPS/INAS	Global Positioning System/Inertial Nav-Attack System
HCU	Heavy Conversion Unit
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
IS	Internal Security
LOA	Local Overseas Allowance
ORBAT	Order of Battle
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PFLO	Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf
QFI	Qualified Flying Instructor
QWI	Qualified Weapons Instructor
RAFM	Royal Air Force Museum (at Hendon)
RCDS	Royal College of Defence Studies
RP	Rocket Projectile
SAF	Sultan's Armed Forces
SARAH	Search And Rescue And Homing
SARBE	Search and Rescue Beacon Equipment
SAS	Special Air Service
SASO	Senior Air Staff Officer
STC	Strike Command
TNA	The National Archives (at Kew)

**THE ROYAL AIR FORCE –
AN INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION
RAF MUSEUM, HENDON, 7 APRIL 2010**

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE SOCIETY'S CHAIRMAN

Air Vice-Marshal Nigel Baldwin CB CBE

Ladies and gentlemen – good morning – good to see you all.

For the first time in nearly fifteen years, I need to change my introductory sentence. Since we last met, Dr Michael Fopp has retired as Director General of the Museum here. Fortunately, he has accepted our invitation to be our speaker immediately after the AGM at the RAF Club on Wednesday evening 16 June when he will talk about the Battle of Britain. I will then have the opportunity to thank him properly for all the help he has given the Society over the years, not least in making the Museum available for our meetings. But today I would like to thank Air Vice-Marshal Peter Dye – who is holding the fort here as the acting DG until a successor is appointed. Thank you Peter and your splendid staff at the Museum who help us so much.

Our Chairman today, Air Vice-Marshal George Black, is a military aviator par excellence. A National Service pilot, he flew Vampires, Sea Hawks with the Fleet Air Arm, and in 1961 was with No 74 Sqn as the Lightning was introduced. He commanded 'Treble One' Squadron and then No 5 Sqn at Binbrook – which is a story in itself (and I speak as the ADC to the AOC 11 Group at the time!). In RAF Germany, he commanded Wildenrath and was closely involved with the policy and concept of operations for the Harrier Force.

After a tour as Commandant of the Royal Observer Corps, he finished his RAF career as Deputy Chief of Operations at HQ Allied Air Force Central Europe at Ramstein. Unusually by modern RAF standards, he has over 8,000 flying hours on 165 different types of aircraft.

He knows enough about the RAF's involvement over the years with allies and what we are calling today 'dominion' air forces to keep us all on track today.

George, you have control.

PRE-WAR DEVELOPMENT OF DOMINION AIR FORCES

Sebastian Cox



*Sebastian Cox joined the Air Historical Branch in 1984, and has been its Head since 1996. He has written widely on the RAF and air power, including editing the *Studies in Air Power* series published by Frank Cass, and has lectured to military and civilian audiences as far afield as the USA, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand and elsewhere.*

Air Marshal thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, it is always a great pleasure to address members of the society and today I have been asked to talk on the relationship between the RAF and the dominion air forces in the inter-war period. In the twenty minutes available I do not think I can really properly do justice to the full extent of the co-operation and assistance between the Royal Air Force and the major dominion air forces, namely Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. I will therefore adopt the approach of looking in some detail at one air force, in this case the Royal Australian Air Force which was the largest and most important, and giving you an indication at the end of the lecture of the similarities and differences which pertain to the other dominions.

The relationship between the Royal Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force goes back to the shared combat experience of the First World War. In April 1918, with the First World War still raging and victory apparently far from sight, and doubtless with the RAF's creation in mind, a perspicacious Australian soldier, Major General J G Legge, pressed his government to establish an air service and to do so without delay.¹ Almost at the same time as Legge's proposal went forward a suggestion was also made for the creation of an Australian naval air service. This latter proposal, however, was largely the work of an RAF officer, Wing Commander H A Maguire, ex-Royal Naval Air Service, who was air service adviser to the Australian Naval Board.²

These two parallel proposals were then considered by a number of committees and sub-committees on which both Maguire and Legge served. It will come as no surprise that the army and navy officers began to squabble over the respective service allocations. It was

Maguire, possibly supported by another RAF officer, L Y K Murray, who first proposed to one of the sub-committees the formation of a separate air service. To cut a long story short the Maguire proposal went to the Australian Defence Council, which in January 1919 concurred in turn, and authorised the creation of the air service committee with authority to spend up to £500,000 on the new service.³

Maguire, a Royal Air Force officer, was thus the key player agitating effectively for the creation of the RAAF from an early stage. As the air adviser to the RAN, he was in a unique position not only to advance the cause of a separate air force, but also simultaneously to ensure that there was no concerted naval opposition to it. As the RAN Naval Board neither endorsed nor rejected his proposals, he seems as their air adviser to have devised policy himself. Without Maguire it seems unlikely that the separate RAAF would have got off the ground. We may surmise that his motive in proposing an independent RAAF was to ensure a slice of the aviation cake for the RAN.

One area in which Maguire fought hard but failed was in attempting to ensure that the administration of the air service would be free from control by either the military or naval boards. The irony here is that the RAN was in due course to regret the formation of a separate service and within a few years was to do its level best to create a separate Australian fleet air arm. The reason being an act of singular generosity from Britain which was to underpin the RAAF and indeed the other dominion air services in their early years.

In June 1919 Australia was offered 100 modern aircraft as gift by the British government, a proposal subsequently increased to 128 to reciprocate Australian wartime gift aircraft. I want to spend a little time analysing the Imperial Gift, as it become known, as it can rightly be identified as a crucial element in the formation and survival of the RAAF, and other dominion air forces.⁴

The gift had several effects, some better than others. In the first place it insulated the nascent RAAF against economic reality. Even as the gift was being prepared for despatch the economic reality in Australia at the time was biting deep into the pioneer airmen's plans and the infant air service committee even telegraphed London with the downbeat message that the gift aircraft could be 'shipped when convenient to Air Ministry and stored here.'⁵ Had the Commonwealth of Australia had to proceed with its tentative plans to buy aircraft at



DH 9A, like this one, included within the Imperial Gift provided the backbone of the RAAF throughout the 1920s. (RAAF Official)

the time, the independent air force would surely have faced insurmountable problems in getting off the ground. But the gift itself did not comprise simply the aircraft. It consisted in reality of an entire self-contained air force, including not a little of the infrastructure to support it. In addition to the aircraft there were 285 motor vehicles, spare aircraft engines, radios, machine tools, photographic equipment, workshop plant, instruments and test apparatus, and flying clothing, together with armament, including 3,000 bombs, thirteen Bessoneau hangars and other aerodrome equipment, as well as spares sufficient for six months' wastage, presumably at wartime rates, since no peacetime rate would have been established by then.⁶ London also accepted responsibility for the costs of packing and shipping, and since the gift was shipped in 19,000 packing cases we should not underestimate the latter.⁷ Had the gift been limited to aircraft I have little doubt they would either have gone into storage or undergone a rapid a possibly terminal decrease in serviceability.

The total value of the gift to Australia has been estimated at some £1,000,000 at 1920 prices⁸, or the equivalent of the entire air service budget for one year of the three year provision made by the Melbourne government at the height of the war in August 1918. On

the formation of the RAAF on 31 March 1921 the service had 151 aircraft on charge, the vast majority, 124, being Imperial Gift aircraft.⁹

The gift was indeed a generous recompense for Australia's wartime loyalty. It was also, of course, a shrewd and self-interested attempt to achieve exactly the purpose it did achieve, ie the establishment of a dominion-based air force able to take on some responsibility for defence in a distant part of the British Empire. Without it, it must be legitimate to doubt that there would have been an independent RAAF at all.

There were, however, some downsides to the gift. The first, and most obvious, was that it was limited to certain types of aircraft, some already obsolescent. Australia was given the opportunity to bid for seven types, but these were all essentially bomber, fighter or trainer aircraft and given Australia's geo-strategic position, it also needed maritime aircraft. Through the gift's imposition of limitations on the types of aircraft it acquired the infant RAAF was unbalanced from the start, and this retarding influence on maritime aviation undermined Maguire's rationale for creating a separate service and played its part in fostering the RAN's increasingly hostile attitude in the early years.

The second limitation of the gift stemmed from its very generosity. By providing in essence a ready-made small scale air force, it allowed the Australian government to indulge in a modicum of benign neglect and budgetary frugality. The relatively small RAAF did not have a sufficiently powerful voice to bring pressure to bear on the government, and was, like its sister service on the other side of the globe, frequently too busy defending its very existence. All in all, however, there can be little doubt that the Imperial Gift gave the RAAF a fair wind at a time when economic storms might have capsized it at the start of its voyage.

Let us now turn to another problem for the RAAF in its early years, namely its ability to provide a senior staff to run the service. Richard Williams, at the time a 28 year old lieutenant colonel, was soon to become the Director Air Services and subsequently first air member of the Air Board. His appointment owed much to Trenchard, who in response to enquiries from the Australian Defence Minister recommended that Australia keep a separate air service and proposed Williams as a suitable Director.¹⁰ Williams initially held the rank of wing commander but had no direct access to ministers and was



The 'father of the RAAF', Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams KBE CB DSO. (AWM)

saddled with a board with more senior army and navy representatives. Williams, writing to Trenchard in December 1927, stated that:

‘At the rate we are going we will never get the necessary proportion of air force units and I find youth and junior rank against me when I try to impress these facts.’¹¹

Semi-isolated as he was, Williams undoubtedly looked to the iconic British air marshal for advice and support from the very beginning of his tenure. He wrote to Trenchard in January 1921 thanking him for the advice that had already been provided by the RAF and requesting

his mentor’s views on the recently approved memorandum outlining the future lines of development for the Australian service. Trenchard instructed the air staff in London to examine the memorandum closely and draft a response.¹²

Which brings us to the RAF/RAAF relationship during the crucial period of the 1920s and 1930s. In the decades leading up to the Second World War, the philosophical and intellectual input remained very high. Because Australian security policy throughout the period was faced with the problem of defining its defence in an imperial context, at a time when British resources were thinly stretched, and the dominion economic base was insufficient to sustain an independent defence posture, all the services drew moral and physical support from the imperial structure. In the case of the RAAF the RAF provided the most tangible justification for its continued existence. Without an RAF to point to as being the imperial model for the service it is difficult to see how the RAAF could have survived. In October 1923 the Committee of Imperial Defence provided the RAAF with a framework for future development within an imperial context first in

the form of an air staff memorandum on *The Development of Dominion Air Forces*¹³, and then more specifically in a further memorandum, number 208C, on the *Air Requirements of the Dominions – Australia* prepared for the Imperial Conference of 1923. At meetings with Trenchard and other RAF officers in late 1923 General Blamey, Admiral Hall Thompson, and Williams agreed to the proposals in CID 208C as the basis on which the RAAF would plan.¹⁴ Thus, from the very start the RAAF took a model prepared by the RAF as the basis for its future planning.

The RAAF consistently used the periodic imperial conferences to draw moral, intellectual and physical sustenance from the RAF. Thus the 1923 Conference and the follow up meetings with Trenchard mentioned above opened up several avenues for the infant Australian service, including provision for short service commissions in the RAF, the attachment of RAAF officers to the RAF, and the provision of specialist training in RAF schools.¹⁵ Both the politicians and the other two services sought to limit the extent to which Williams could use the RAF as a surrogate for RAAF ambitions, but Trenchard and Williams exchanged regular letters, and the latter was able to use the former as a conduit to pass or reinforce ideas and suggestions to Australian ministers that his own rank or constitutional position made difficult.¹⁶

In the early years it undoubtedly made economic and practical sense for a force, which on its formation numbered 151 personnel all told and which struggled to reach a thousand permanent personnel through its first decade, to draw on the far greater resources of the RAF. The RAAF therefore not only adopted RAF training syllabi, but adhered to RAF publications, practices and standards wherever possible.¹⁷ In terms of higher staff training and specialist training in areas such as photography, navigation and weapons training the RAAF relied almost entirely on the RAF. The details of the short service commission scheme put forward at the 1923 Conference were agreed in early 1924, with the details being thrashed out in the meetings in London involving Blamey, Williams and various RAF officers and Air Ministry officials. Both air forces benefited greatly from the short service scheme. In essence the RAAF was able to develop its flying training organisation, specifically No 1 FTS, on a viable scale large enough to justify the number of instructors required



The Avro 504K was the RAAF's trainer until it was replaced by the Gipsy Moth in the late 1920s. (RAAF Official)

to keep it in being, by providing the first year's training of the short service officers going to the UK. It also benefited when the successful candidates returned to Australia on completion of their UK service and entered the RAAF reserve, or were available for permanent commissions. The RAF clearly benefited from the provision of high quality short service officers, who would potentially be available to fight alongside it in time of war, and from inculcating its views in the imperial services.

Apart from these symbiotic training links, the greatest support provided by the RAF in the inter-war period came from its position as an alternative locus of informed advice both for the RAAF itself, and perhaps more importantly for the Australian government. When in 1926 the naval board attempted to renege on a previously agreed policy regarding naval air agreements Williams again drew on imperial policy to bolster the RAAF's position. He also wrote to Trenchard enclosing his own paper to the Minister on the subject and asked the RAF to back the RAAF's case in the forthcoming imperial conference.¹⁸ In 1932 when a new incoming Australian government raised the spectre of abolition once more, Williams again used back channels to enlist the RAF in defending the RAAF. When the Minister for External Affairs visited London the UK Secretary of State stressed its detrimental effect on imperial defence. The proposal was duly rejected by the government and the RAAF lived on.

Apart from these indirect methods of using RAF and imperial influence to advantage, the RAAF also resorted to more open and formal methods, principally in the form of the two inspection tours and reports written on the RAAF by senior RAF officers, one at the end of each decade. Williams welcomed such visits, beforehand at least, and agitated for them behind the scenes. In 1927, before the first such tour by Sir John Salmond, Williams wrote frankly to Trenchard that he wanted such a visit to give an informed opinion.

Sir John Salmond's report was predictably highly critical of much of the RAAF, though its introduction exonerated the hierarchy of much of the blame. It exposed the obsolete or worn out nature of much RAAF equipment, poor conditions of service, and low quality training. Although Williams suffered a little from the backlash which ensued, he was able to utilise the Salmond report to try to force the Government's hand on a number of matters, though the severe economic conditions which soon followed meant that material improvements in equipment were a long time coming. Although the government endorsed the Salmond report it was therefore not acted upon until much later, when it served as the basis for the RAAF's expansion scheme.¹⁹ Salmond believed, not without some justification, that Williams lacked practical experience of command, and also apparently felt that the RAAF was in danger of stagnating.²⁰ To be fair, whatever his personal shortcomings, it is difficult to see what Williams could have done to prevent the latter given the situation he found himself in, and the fact that the Australian government accepted Salmond's report but failed to implement it for a decade clearly illustrates the problem he faced. Equally, it was probably precisely the underlying political and economic difficulties which ensured that Williams survived and was not replaced, temporarily or otherwise, by a senior RAF officer on secondment.

In fact the Australian government subsequently used Williams' highly effective technique of appealing to the big brother RAF, against him. Shortly before the Second World War Williams was replaced as a result of criticisms made in another report on the RAAF by a senior RAF officer, Edward Ellington.

I hope that this brief and superficial survey has given you a flavour of the close material, practical and intellectual links between the RAF and RAAF. As I indicated at the start of this paper it is not possible in



The Imperial Gift to Canada included 125 aeroplanes, half of them Clerget-powered Avro 504Ks, like this one which was rebuilt in 1927 to become a Lynx-engined 504N. (CF)

the time available to cover the other Dominions in any detail. Like Australia the other dominions received generous Imperial Gifts. Canada utilised its aircraft to form the Canadian Air Force, later the RCAF, initially on a militia basis. The Air Force initially had additional responsibility for civil aviation and devoted much of the resources to that end. Nevertheless, the Gift 'did provide the [Canadian] Air Board with the means of equipping a military training organization ...'²¹ It was not until the end of the decade that the RCAF purchased any other military aircraft. The CAF's official regulations were also adapted from the RAF's, and Air-Vice Marshal Gwatkin, the Inspector General, corresponded with Trenchard, and received moral support and advice in the same manner as Williams.²² RCAF officers also attended the RAF Staff College, which gave them an intellectual underpinning which a service of such modest size could not have sustained, and which was to stand them in good stead in the 1930s. Indeed both the Canadian Government and its air service recognised that the fate of the RCAF was intimately bound up with that of the RAF. Had the latter not survived the political battles of the 1920s as an independent service there would have been no Canadian equivalent.

New Zealand followed Canada, but struggled with sustaining any permanent forces and also adopted a militia model. In 1928 John Salmond wrote another of his reports on the New Zealand air service

and at the time there were 22 permanent personnel, 18 aircraft, and three MT vehicles, which gives some sense of what was and was not possible. As with the RAAF the New Zealand service was, sensibly enough given its size, subordinated to the military. Salmond recommended a modest increase in establishment and also suggested that the Director of the Air Service be of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and that he should have direct access to the Minister.²³

South Africa, like Australia, used the 100 aircraft of the Imperial Gift as the basis for a separate air force. Since it was South Africa's Jan Christian Smuts who wrote the report which led to the creation of the Royal Air Force in 1918 it is hardly surprising that he followed the same course in his own country. The South African Air Force dates its formation to February 1920, although the title was first officially used in 1923. As with the other Dominions it maintained close links with the RAF through its Director, Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, a decorated RFC veteran. As with all the Dominions the South Africans made much use of the RAF for training, but also made more determined efforts than Australia or New Zealand to develop both technical training and an indigenous manufacturing capability. There were, however, sensitivities with respect to the strong Afrikaaner influence in South African domestic politics which curtailed the very overt expression of links to the British Empire and Imperial interests.²⁴

Given the problems of scale and economic realities all these Dominions looked to the RAF for training, support and guidance and all received direct and indirect support in much the same way as the Australians had. Airmen from all these nations were trained at Cranwell and the RAF Staff College and many served out short service commissions with the RAF and took the links, experience and knowledge they gained back to their own domestic forces. Others, of course, formally joined the RAF and many served with distinction before and during the Second World War. The names of Keith Park and Sir Quintin Brand from the Battle of Britain, AVM Carr and Donald Bennett at Bomber Command, and Raymond Collishaw in North Africa all spring readily to mind, but there are many others.

With that brief survey of the other Dominions I shall wind up. I can expand a little on this in questions if you wish. Thank you very much.

Notes:

¹ Gillison, Douglas; *The Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942* (Canberra, 1962), pp1-2. Although devoted to the RAAF in the early part of the Second World War the first three chapters of the book contain a very concise and useful exposition on the formation and early years of the Service.

² *Ibid*, pp2-3.

³ *Ibid*, pp3-6 On the early manoeuvrings involving Legge and Maguire see also Coulthard-Clark, C D; *The Third Brother – The Royal Australian Air Force 1921-1939* (Sydney, 1991) pp1-3.

⁴ For further details on the gift see Bennett, John; *The Imperial Gift* (Maryborough, 1996), *passim*.

⁵ Gillison, p10.

⁶ Bennett, p19.

⁷ *Ibid*, p13.

⁸ Bennett, p19.

⁹ *Ibid*, p20.

¹⁰ Williams, p117.

¹¹ Letter Williams to Trenchard, 31 December 1927, Trenchard Papers RAF Museum Hendon, MFC76/1/266.

¹² Letter Williams to Trenchard, 14 January 1921 and undated [1 March 1921?] draft reply. TNA AIR2/213.

¹³ TNA CAB 5/5 CID Paper 206-C, 'The Development of Dominion Air Forces'.

¹⁴ TNA AIR2/1453, minutes of Conference and correspondence between Trenchard and Blamey, November 1923.

¹⁵ See *Ibid*, for detailed exchanges between 1923 and 1932.

¹⁶ For examples see the exchanges contained in the Trenchard papers, RAFM MFC76/1/266.

¹⁷ For example see the list of books for the training of Citizen Air Force day bombing/reconnaissance pilots in the Salmond Report, Appendix I(2) Attachment C. TNA AIR20/5994.

¹⁸ Williams to Trenchard, 3 September 1926, Trenchard Papers RAFM MFC/76/1/266.

¹⁹ Stephens, Alan; *Going Solo: the Royal Australian Air Force 1946-1971* (Canberra, 1995) p3

²⁰ Coulthard-Clark, p102.

²¹ Douglas, W A B; *Creation of a National Air Force, Volume II of The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force*, p48.

²² *Ibid*, pp50 and 57.

²³ TNA AIR8/96 'Report by Air Marshal Sir John Salmond on the Organization, Administration, Training, and General Policy of Development of the New Zealand Air Force', 1928.

²⁴ See letter from UK High Commissioner to Rt Hon Malcolm Macdonald MP, 28 May 1936, TNA AIR2/1192.

ANSWERING THE MOTHER COUNTRY'S CALL

Wg Cdr Colin Cummings



Colin Cummings served in the Supply Branch for 31 years. After a series of station tours, mostly in the Far East, he spent a significant element of his service involved with IT systems, within the Supply Branch and in the Directorate of Flight Safety, eventually becoming the first Supply Officer to manage an aircraft Support Authority (the Jaguar). Author of a series of books on aircraft accidents, he holds an RAFVR(T)

commission and is a member of the RAFHS Executive Committee.

The Second World War saw a major strengthening of the RAF by the addition of many thousands of men and women from the occupied countries and you will read about these people in later papers. However, by far the largest and most effective contributions to the RAF came from the Commonwealth countries and it is this effort which I shall summarise in this paper. First, however, I shall briefly consider some other non-UK citizens who served with, or in support of, the RAF but who fall outside the main thrust of this presentation. These fall into two categories: individuals and formed groupings.

At the start of World War II, the RAF was already employing numbers of Commonwealth personnel and these were almost exclusively aircrew on short-service commissions who had enlisted pre-war. The threat of war and its subsequent reality brought forth a rush of enthusiastic young men from the Dominions and countries which were neutral. Terence O'Brian, an Australian who served with distinction in Coastal and Bomber Commands before fighting throughout the campaigns in South East Asia, describes in his book, *Chasing After Danger*,¹ how he abandoned his life as a planter in the Solomons and made his way to England on the Imperial Airways flying boat service to join up. Others, similarly disposed, also travelled great distances to 'do their bit': Michael Bentine, the comedian, was eventually to wear his RAF uniform with the shoulder flash 'Peru', whilst others crossed from the USA into Canada and joined the RCAF, despite committing a federal offence in so doing.

Some indication of the early contribution made by, largely volunteer, aircrew from the countries of the old Empire can be seen in Battle of Britain manpower. New Zealand made the largest with 126, 94 of whom were pilots, followed by Canada, Australia and South Africa/Rhodesia in that order. Nine Irishmen and eleven Americans also took part but they, of course, were not from the Empire.

As far as formed groups are concerned, you will later hear brief mention of The Eagle Squadrons but units of exiled Greeks and Yugoslavs were also formed into nationally identifiable squadrons.

The embryo Indian Air Force – and at that this stage we are talking of course about ‘undivided India’ – will not be considered further because it was essentially not independent but formed, trained, equipped and deployed on operations under the overall leadership of the RAF.

Although the adventures of the myriad of individuals who found their way into the RAF, its reserves and auxiliaries would doubtless make a series of fascinating vignettes, I need to move on to the main thrust of this paper.

It will be appreciated that many of the Commonwealth countries were themselves close to war zones or directly affected by enemy activity. They, therefore, retained the forces necessary to defend themselves or to participate within their own ‘national’ air forces on operations in such places as the South West Pacific or the eastern most reaches of what is now Indonesia. I must perforce ignore that contribution to – let us call it – ‘local operations and home defence’ – although it is worth keeping it in mind as I outline the direct contributions made to the motherland.

You will find in a later paper, the training arrangements, including the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. The BCATP was the outcome of the Riverdale Agreement of 1939 which would eventually lead to more than 100,000 aircrew being trained in Canada, most of whom would serve with the RAF.

Article XV of the Riverdale Agreement, dealt with the employment of the aircrews trained under the plan and subsequent bi-lateral agreements between the UK Government and the participating Dominion countries, covered the individual detail and variations.

South Africa was not a party to the agreement but it also participated in a way which contributed significant resources to the

allied air effort and for the purposes of this presentation I intend to treat them and their contribution in line with the others.

Whilst Riverdale was signed off at the end of 1939, there followed an hiatus before the fruits of that agreement began to be harvested. In the meantime, the nations involved contributed as best they could from the resources they had available. In practice, it can be accepted that the Article XV agreement and the bi-laterals that followed were not taken as a rigid commitment but as a flexible and pragmatic arrangement geared to the operation of an air force comprised of many disparate parts.

By way of a caveat, it is worth remembering that within the scope of Article XV, although the Dominions operated squadrons carrying their badges and insignia and crewed nominally by their air force personnel, there never was nor could there be a national exclusivity. There are many reasons for this and in summary they include:

- The majority of ground crew personnel were RAF.
- In the early years, there was a shortage of experienced Dominion personnel to fill the higher echelons and hence many RAF personnel were appointed to command positions within the contributing nations' air forces.
- In some aircrew specialisations; notably the flight engineer, the RAF trained and provided the majority of personnel throughout the war years.
- The natural ebb and flow of personnel made it difficult, if not impossible, to preserve a 'national identity', as indicated by the table at Figure 1 which illustrates the multi-national composition of the aircrew element of a nominally 'British' squadron.

Starting then with the Royal Australian Air Force. Shortly before the outbreak of hostilities, the RAAF formed No 10 Sqn and its initial complement of crews was sent to the UK for training on the Sunderland, which the Australians had ordered. On declaration, the Australian Government offered the squadron to the RAF and it remained attached to the Service for the entire duration and hence has the distinction of being not just the first Commonwealth unit to serve with the RAF but also the only one to do so throughout the war and in

Date	Type/ Theatre	Total Aircrew	RAAF	RCAF	RNZAF	SAAF	% Dominion
Nov 41	Blenheim Egypt	75	28	2	–	3	44%
Feb 42	Blenheim Burma	72*	36	3	2	1	58%
Oct 43	Vengeance India	38	15	2	1	–	43%
Sep 44	Mosquito India	46	15	2	1	–	47%

*Air echelon only. Another 24 went by sea; 71% of them (13 × RAAF and 4 × RCAF) were from the Dominions.

Fig 1. The level of Dominion aircrew manning in a representative RAF squadron serving overseas – No 45 Sqn.

the same anti-submarine/maritime patrol role. In 1942, No 461 Sqn was formed from a nucleus of No 10 Sqn and it also served in the same role for the rest of the war, the two squadrons sinking a total of twelve U-Boats. Also deployed in Coastal Command was No 455 Sqn. This unit had been the first Australian unit in Bomber Command, having been operational in 5 Group from late 1941. It transferred to the anti-shipping role in the spring of 1942, initially still flying the Hampden but replacing these with Beaufighters. It eventually joined the Dallachy Wing and achieved considerable success against enemy shipping off Norway and Denmark.

The Australian contribution to Bomber Command took the form of six main force squadrons, operating mainly within 1 and 5 Groups for much of the war. A total of about 13,000 Australian airmen served in Bomber Command, a significant proportion being outside their own air force. Casualties amongst RAAF personnel amounted to 4,050; 7.3% of the Bomber Command total. Another bomber unit, No 464 Sqn, was equipped initially with Venturas but in 1943 it was reassigned to 2nd TAF and, rearmed with Mosquitos, undertook a series of pinpoint bombing raids against high value enemy targets.

With the threat of war in the Far East, four RAAF squadrons were deployed to defend Singapore and Malaya. When the Japanese attacked No 1 Sqn was at Kota Bahru and No 8 Sqn at Kuantan, both with Hudsons, while No 21 Sqn was at Sungei Patani with Brewster Buffalos. A second Buffalo unit, No 453 Sqn, was at Sembawang.



After spending a year in Fighter Command, No 457 Sqn RAAF was withdrawn to Australia (as seen here) where its Spitfires were to provide a counter to Japanese air attacks on Darwin.

As an aside, the Buffalo had been rejected for service in Europe but was described by Air Marshal Brooke-Popham as ‘quite good enough for Malaya’.

The Japanese made swift gains and the northern airfields were quickly captured. Losses amongst all the squadrons were significant and eventually they became composite units before being withdrawn to Batavia (Java) and their remnant eventually evacuated to Australia. There the ‘home’ squadrons were reformed and fought during the actions in the south west Pacific.

The RAAF contribution to Fighter Command comprised Nos 452 and 457 Sqs, both of which were equipped with Spitfires. Their deployment to the UK was relatively short lived and they were returned to Australia, together with the RAF’s No 54 Sqn, in order to provide the air defence of Darwin. No 453 Sqn, which had effectively ceased to exist after the fall of Singapore, was reformed in the UK in June 1942 and flew Spitfires in Europe for the remainder of the war.

The RAAF also contributed several fighter and light bomber squadrons to the campaigns in North Africa and the Middle East and these units for the most part continued on to the Italian campaign

The RAAF suffered 9,000 fatal casualties in all theatres. Two VCs were won by RAAF personnel, one in the South West Pacific, the

other, by Flight Sergeant R H Middleton, who was flying with Bomber Command.² The overall tally of gallantry awards exceeded 3,000, to which must be added those recognised for distinguished service.

Like the Australians, the New Zealand Government responded very promptly when war was declared. Having ordered a small initial batch of Wellingtons, a number of RNZAF aircrew were in the UK training on the first of these aircraft and the resources of the New Zealand Bomber Flight were immediately offered to the British Government. On 8 April 1940, the unit was redesignated as No 75 (New Zealand) Sqn of the RAF. It spent the whole of the war with 3 Group, progressing via Stirlings to Lancasters. The personnel of the squadron earned some 120 gallantry awards, including a Victoria Cross to Sergeant J R Ward. On 1 April 1946, in recognition of the unit's wartime achievements, the No 75 number plate was transferred to the RNZAF in perpetuity and it remained in use until that air force was effectively emasculated in 2001.

New Zealand contributed six squadrons to the RAF under Article XV. No 485 Sqn was employed as a fighter squadron throughout and flew various marks of Spitfire before moving to the Tempest in the spring of 1945. The Tempests were withdrawn before the conversion process had been completed and Typhoons were issued instead. In their turn, the Typhoons were also withdrawn and the squadron was still flying Spitfires when the war ended. A second single-seat fighter squadron, No 486, flew the Typhoon for two years before converting to the Tempest which it operated with considerable success against the V-1, claiming over 220 destroyed.³ As that threat passed the squadron moved to Europe for the rest of the war during which it was credited with 81 confirmed victories.

In the summer of 1942, the New Zealanders formed the Ventura-equipped No 487 Sqn at Feltwell. Its first operational sortie, flown on 6 December 1942, was a raid on the Philips plant in Eindhoven but of the sixteen crews involved; three, including that of the Squadron Commander, failed to return. The squadron operated relatively infrequently until 3 May 1943 when it sent eleven aircraft to Amsterdam. Only one aircraft returned, so badly damaged that it was written off, all of the others had been shot down, the leader; Squadron Leader Leonard Trent, being awarded a Victoria Cross when the full



A 'Torbeau' of No 489 Sqn RNZAF being escorted by a Mustang of No 315 (Polish) Sqn.

account of the raid was revealed after the war. Re-equipped and led by Percy Pickard (of *Target For Tonight* fame) the squadron flew its first mission with Mosquitos against a power station near Nantes, subsequently specialising in precision attacks, including the raids on Amiens Prison and the Gestapo HQs in Aarhus and Copenhagen.

The recently formed No 488 Sqn was in Singapore, still working-up on Buffaloes when the Japanese attacked. Hastily provided with some Hurricanes, it was soon rendered non-effective and the survivors were evacuated to New Zealand. In June 1942 the 488 number plate was reallocated to a night fighter squadron being formed at Church Fenton. Mounted on Beaufighters, and later Mosquitos, No 488 Sqn flew air defence and intruder sorties for the rest of the war.

As an anti-shipping unit, No 489 Sqn had a fairly slow build up progressing via Blenheims and Hampdens to Beaufighters. Nevertheless, the squadron had a steady success rate against enemy shipping and eventually joined the very high-scoring Dallachy Wing, No 489 Sqn contributing the RNZAF element to the unique Commonwealth constitution of this wing, the other squadrons being provided by the RAF, RAAF and RCAF.

The last RNZAF unit formed under Article XV was No 490 Sqn which flew Catalinas and then Sunderlands from Jui in West Africa from June 1943.

Besides Ward and Trent, the RNZAF had a third VC winner in Flying Officer Trigg, who received a posthumous award operating with No 200 Sqn. Of particular interest is that Trigg's VC citation relied on evidence from *Oberleutnant zur See* Klemens Schamong – the skipper of the U-Boat that Trigg's crew sank. Other awards for gallantry totalled nearly 1,300, but the cost to a country of less than four million was the loss of 4,000 airmen and women.

The Canadian contribution to the RAF in the war was the largest of all the Commonwealth countries. In addition to its pivotal role in the training process, it contributed a large number of operational squadrons, formed a bomber group and then assumed the financial burden of supporting much of its own war effort in the UK.

When war broke out, there was an RCAF liaison officer based in London, fifteen Canadians undertaking training courses in the UK and three officers on 'exchange'. However, the number of Canadians serving in the RAF actually exceeded the total officer strength of the RCAF.

Two army co-operation squadrons were immediately earmarked to accompany 1st Canadian Division to Europe and AVM George Croil, the CAS, urged that the RCAF should form an overseas command comprising a Fighter and a Bomber Group – each of six squadrons – to serve under RAF command in the field. Priority, however, had to be given to setting up the air training facilities that Canada had undertaken to provide and this absorbed much of the RCAF's capacity throughout 1940. Nevertheless, the army co-operation units, Nos 110 and 112 Sqs, were sent to the UK, although the fall of France precluded their being employed in their intended role.

No 1 Sqn arrived in the UK in June 1940 and, equipped with Hurricanes, it flew with 11 Group during the Battle of Britain, engaging the *Luftwaffe* for the first time on 26 August. In the months which followed, claims for thirty enemy aircraft destroyed, eight probables and thirty-four damaged were upheld for the loss of ten aircraft and three pilots killed. However, of the ninety Canadians who served in the battle a total of twenty were killed.

To conform with the Article XV numbering policy, and to avoid confusion with similarly numbered RAF units, the three RCAF squadrons already in the UK were redesignated as Nos 400-402 Sqs in March 1941, but it was decided not to renumber two RAF

squadrons which had a strong Canadian component.

The build up of RCAF squadrons within Fighter Command continued and there were eventually twelve, of which eight were day fighters, three night fighters and one an intruder squadron.

The success of the RAF's Desert Air Force, during the North African campaign, pointed up the great advantages of providing the Army with close air support and reconnaissance and it was decided to create a Tactical Air Force to work with the British and Canadian armies within 21st Army Group when the invasion of Europe took place. 2nd TAF – as it became known – comprised the light and medium bombers of No 2 Gp, the fighters, fighter bombers and recon aircraft of Nos 83 and 84 Gps and the day and night fighters of No 85 Gp for the defence of 2nd TAF's airfields.

It was a Canadian ambition to create a group which would be able to support its own army in the field but the number of RCAF Article XV squadrons available fell short of the thirty required. The suggested re-rolling of several squadrons already deployed in the UK, in order to make up the necessary numbers, was opposed by the RAF, as they were already gainfully employed on other tasks, seen as vital. Even the deployment of six additional squadrons from Canada could not provide enough resources for a complete group but in June 1943 it was agreed that the available RCAF units would be assigned to 83 Group which was earmarked to support 1st Canadian Army. However, in January 1944, it was decided that, as the more experienced formation, 83 Group would actually support the British 2nd Army. No 84 Gp, therefore, swapped places with 83 but, as the former had no Canadian squadrons in its ORBAT, the RCAF's desire to fight with Canadian troops was thwarted.

In 1944, the RCAF formed three Dakota squadrons. Two of these, Nos 435 and 436 Sqns, were in India where they became operational late in the year, thereafter supporting the campaign in Burma while coping with the inhospitable terrain, the weather and Japanese fighters. On one occasion six Dakotas were attacked over the DZ, two being shot down and others damaged, leading to a reversion to night drops until fighter escorts could be provided.

The third transport unit, No 437 Sqn, was formed within 46 Group at Blakehill Farm. Since it was created by the simple expedient of posting Canadian crews from the other Dakota squadrons in the group,



A Sunderland of No 422 Sqn RCAF alighting at Castle Archdale.

it was declared operational in a matter of days and just in time to contribute to the attack on Arnhem. Towing gliders during the assault phase and dropping supplies thereafter, the squadron lost four aircraft, twelve aircrew and nine Army air despatchers.

Canada also made a significant contribution to the coastal and anti-submarine tasks. By the spring of 1944 it was fielding two squadrons of Sunderlands at Castle Archdale, a pair of torpedo-armed Wellingtons squadrons; one at Bircham Newton the other at Chivenor, and a Beaufighter squadron at Davidstow Moor engaged in anti-shiping work. On D-Day, this squadron attacked three enemy destroyers which were trying to interdict the invasion fleet and sank all of them. To reinforce the anti-submarine capability over the invasion period, No 162 Sqn – a home-based RCAF unit – was loaned to Coastal Command and operated the Canso (a *Canadian-built Catalina*. Ed) from Wick. Their success in denying the northern transit route to enemy U-boats was spectacularly successful and the unit was involved in five successful sinkings. During one of these attacks, a Canso piloted by Flight Lieutenant David Hornell was shot down and the survivors spent 21 hours in the water before being rescued. Unfortunately, Hornell died shortly after being taken from the water but received a posthumous Victoria Cross for his actions.

Having formed on Catalinas at Stranraer in July 1941, No 413 Sqn was sent to reinforce Ceylon in March the following year. Within a



A Lancaster of No 424 Sqn RCAF.

few weeks the squadron was carrying out reconnaissance flights from Koggala and on 4 April, a Catalina captained by Squadron Leader Leonard Birchall spotted a large Japanese fleet about 350 miles south of Ceylon. Before his aircraft was shot down, the crew had radioed a sighting report which gave sufficient warning for the defence forces to counter the Japanese. Birchall and the survivors of his crew were taken prisoner. Birchall was given the epithet ‘Saviour of Ceylon’ and awarded a DFC and, for his later courage and example whilst a POW, the OBE. The squadron continued to operate in the Indian Ocean area for the remainder of the war but success against both U-boats and Japanese submarines was hard to come by.

Without a doubt, the major contribution made by Canada was its involvement in the bomber offensive against Germany. In the spring of 1941, No 405 Sqn was formed on Wellingtons and assigned to No 4 Group. Re-equipped with Halifaxes a year later, it spent six months on detachment to Coastal Command before joining No 8 Gp to become the RCAF element of the Pathfinder Force.

The build up of RCAF bomber squadrons continued throughout 1941 and ‘42, with most starting on Wellingtons and progressing to the Halifax or Lancaster, only the last two, Nos 433 and 434 Sqn being armed with four-engined types from the outset.

I have already mentioned Air Marshal Croil’s ideas for forming fighter and bomber groups but the former was a non-starter because the RCAF was unable to field anything like the number of squadrons



AOC 6 (RCAF) Gp 1944-45, AVM 'Black Mike' McEwen with 'Blackie' and the last of 300 Canadian-built Lancaster Xs, KB999/VR•M, of No 419 Sqn RCAF that was named for him as 'Malton Mike'.

required to fill the ORBAT. A bomber group was a more realistic proposition, however, and in 1941 it was agreed that a Canadian bomber group would be formed when the RCAF could deploy sufficient squadrons. During 1942, as their numbers increased, the RCAF bomber squadrons were concentrated on the more northern airfields within 4 Group and the

advance party of a Canadian-manned Group HQ moved to Allerton Hall near Knaresborough on 25 October 1942. No 6 (RCAF) Gp assumed operational status on 1 January 1943, with six squadrons at four stations, additional units being absorbed over the next few days.

In late March 1943 Bomber Command instituted a 'base' system whereby a clutch of airfields was run as an HQ plus (usually) two outlying satellites with heavier engineering and much administration being handled centrally. The groundcrew element were withdrawn from the squadrons, reformed into quasi-independent Servicing Echelons numbered in the 9000-series, their duties being confined to essentially first-line servicing – re-arming, refuelling and rectification of relatively minor faults. Within No 6 Gp there were eventually three operational bases, Nos 62, 63 and 64, based on Linton-on-Ouse, Leeming and Middleton St George respectively; No 61 was a training base operating from Topcliffe.⁴ By the end of the war in Europe, 6 Group occupied eight stations and controlled fourteen squadrons.

The cost to Canada was significant; Kostenuk and Griffin record 17,100 personnel killed or died while serving with the RCAF, including 12,266 on operations and 1,906 in training accidents. Within



A Typhoon of No 266 (Rhodesia) Sqn.

RAF Bomber Command the casualties totalled 9,980. They also note that by the war's end a quarter of Bomber Command's aircrew were Canadian of whom almost 6,000 were flying in units outside No 6 Group.⁵

A large number of honours and awards were bestowed on Canadian Air Force personnel, the most notable being a posthumous Victoria Cross to Plt Off Andrew Mynarski, in addition to the previously noted VC to David Hornell.

Although it had been a self-governing colony since 1923 and the British government had not exercised its reserved powers, Rhodesia was *de facto* – if not *de jure* – of Dominion status and that is how I shall treat the country in this paper.

The auxiliary members of the Southern Rhodesian Air Unit were called up in August 1939 and by the end of the month a small force of six Harts or Audaxes was at Nairobi. As the build up continued, the air unit was renamed the Southern Rhodesian Air Force and its operational unit in Kenya became No 1 Sqn SRAF. The SRAF was absorbed into the Royal Air Force in April 1940 and the squadron was redesignated as No 237 (Rhodesia) Sqn RAF.

The Italians declared war in June 1940 and the squadron fought in the East African campaign before moving to Egypt in the following spring. Re-equipped with Hurricanes, No 237 Sqn operated over

Egypt, Iraq and Libya until early 1944 when, by this time mounted on Spitfires it moved to Corsica and southern France, ending the war in northern Italy.

Another unit granted the right to incorporate the name 'Rhodesia' within its title was No 266 Sqn.⁶ Following the Battle of Britain, numbers of Rhodesians were posted to the unit and the Balateur Eagle was approved as its badge in August 1941. Initially flying Spitfires, it changed to Typhoons in early 1942 and operated these aircraft in the fighter and fighter bomber role for the remainder of the war.

The third unit to be 'named' for Rhodesia,⁷ in recognition of the colony's contribution to the war effort, was No 44 Sqn, the first to convert fully to the Lancaster. In April 1942 No 44 Sqn provided half a dozen aircraft which, with 97 Squadron, made a daylight attack on the MAN diesel engine plant at Augsburg, resulting in South African born Squadron Leader John Nettleton being awarded the Victoria Cross. Despite the squadron's nominal association with Rhodesia, however, no more than a quarter of its crews were ever Rhodesian.

For so small a country, the war cost Rhodesia a significant number of casualties; 498 fatalities from 2,409 men who served in the RAF. Nonetheless, these men received 258 honours and awards.

In South Africa the prospect of war with Germany was a contentious issue, since the sitting Prime Minister, Barry Hertzog, many MPs and a considerable portion of the population were either sympathetic to the Nazi cause or were, given the divisions within white society, simply anti-British. The constitution, however, imposed on the South African Government an obligation to declare war and a caucus of MPs immediately began to debate the issue. The outcome was that Hertzog was replaced by Jan Smuts – to whom the RAF already owed a considerable debt – and South Africa declared war on 6 September.

At the time, the SAAF was both small and poorly equipped; it had few modern aircraft and little ability to mount or sustain military operations. As a result, the South Africans line was that they would only participate in operations within Africa but pragmatism would modify that stance in both operations and training.

To protect British possessions in East Africa, two SA Army divisions and supporting troops were deployed to Kenya in early 1940 and these were supported by a fighter squadron, equipped with



Mohawks of No 3 Sqn SAAF in Kenya.

Hurricanes and Furies, and two bomber squadrons; one of Ju 86s, the other of Hartbeestes. This initial deployment was subsequently reinforced by Gladiators, a second squadron of Hurricanes and two army co-operation squadrons.

The Italians entered the war on 10 June and first blood went to the South Africans, who attacked an Italian army concentration just inside Abyssinia at dawn the following morning. Despite being significantly outnumbered – at something like 7 to 1 – the aggressive tactics of the SAAF gave them the upper hand and they inflicted significant losses on their enemy.

As the tide swung in favour of the Commonwealth forces, the RAF redeployed some of its squadrons to Egypt, leaving much of the air effort in East Africa to ‘the Springboks’. At the conclusion of the campaign, the SAAF had flown over 5,000 sorties in the course of which it had destroyed about 140 enemy aircraft in the air or on the ground at a cost of 84 aircrew killed.

When the SAAF moved to North Africa to support the RAF, they fielded five squadrons of fighters, four of bombers and two recon squadrons. The South Africans fought throughout the North African campaign being progressively equipped with more capable types, including later marks of Hurricanes, Blenheims, Tomahawks, Marylands; Kittyhawks, Spitfires, Bostons and Baltimores.

Time prevents a detailed description of the SAAF’s participation in the Mediterranean Theatre. Suffice to say that, following the Axis collapse in Tunisia it played a full part in subsequent operations in Sicily, Italy and the Balkans adding Marauders, Beaufighters,



Baltimores of No 21 Sqn SAAF.

Mustangs and Mosquitos to its armoury. In 1944, it received Liberators and formed two squadrons, Nos 31 and 34, to complement the RAF's Italy-based heavy bomber force. An examination of squadron records indicates, incidentally, that, as elsewhere, there was a strong international influence within the composition of SAAF bomber crews.

The SAAF also developed its involvement in the tactical transport business as the war progressed. At first, No 28 Sqn was equipped with a large number of Ansons with which to operate what amounted to a communications service but the Anson was also used for SD insertions into the Balkans. The Anson was later supplemented with some Wellingtons before all were replaced by Dakotas. A second transport unit, No 44 Sqn was formed in 1944 and from early 1945 this was based in Italy where both it and No 28 Sqn worked alongside the RAF's No 267 Sqn to provide much of the dedicated tactical transport.

By the last year of the war, South African officers were in positions of authority, not just in their own air force but in RAF formations as well. For example, No 92 Sqn (Spitfires) was commanded by a SAAF major whilst No 271 Sqn (Dakotas) was led by the 48 year old Lt-Col Pierre Joubert DSO AFC. 'Joubie', who was

an immensely popular leader, was to meet his end when, in the middle of celebrations to mark VJ-Day, a homemade firework exploded and he sustained fatal injuries.

A few South Africans flew with Bomber Command and thirty-four were lost on operations, including Captain Edwin Swales, who was awarded a posthumous VC as a Pathfinder with 582 Squadron. A total of 2,227 members of the SAAF were killed and 932 wounded; 273 were taken prisoner, three of whom were murdered for their involvement in the Great Escape.

SUMMARY:

In this paper, I have been able only to scratch the surface of the contribution made to the war effort by the Commonwealth countries. There can be no doubt, however, that the involvement of many thousands of men and women from the Commonwealth, whether serving in national units or within the RAF, represented a vital element and one for which the 'Mother Country' should be eternally grateful.

¹ O'Brien, Terence; *Chasing After Danger: A Combat Pilot's War Over Europe and the Far East 1939-42* (London, 1990).

² Two other Australian airmen won VCs while serving with the RAF.

³ The most recent accounting, Brian Cull's *Diver! Diver! Diver!* (Grub Street, 2009) suggests that No 486 Sqn may have accounted for as many as 246 V-1s.

⁴ In November 1944, a reformed No 7 Gp took over all HCUs and with them, the training bases previously run by each Bomber Group, Topcliffe's No 61 Base becoming No 76 (RCAF) Base.

⁵ Kostenuk, Samuel and Griffin, John; *RCAF Squadrons and Aircraft* (Toronto, 1977) p79.

⁶ With effect from 20 August 1941.

⁷ With effect from 12 September 1941.

‘REPEAT, PLEASE!’ POLES AND CZECHOSLOVAKS IN THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Peter Devitt



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After the Fall of France, in June 1940, numbers of airmen from occupied Europe escaped to the United Kingdom to continue the fight against Hitler’s Germany. The largest contingents came from the east, and, by August that year, there were some 8,400 Polish and 900 Czechoslovak air force personnel stationed here. For the Poles, who had been defeated and driven from their homeland in 1939, only to be forced to flee again, Britain was now *Wyspa Ostatniej Nadziei* or ‘The Island of Last Hope.’ Churchill announced that the continental airmen were to join the Royal Air Force. In doing so he sought to show the world, and especially the neutral United States, that Britain and her Allies were committed to continuing, and winning, the war. The Prime Minister was also aware that after suffering heavy losses in the Battle of France, and in covering the evacuation from Dunkirk, the RAF was short of 450 fighter pilots and needed all the help it could get.¹ For reasons of national prestige, the Polish and Czechoslovak governments-in-exile established in London were also keen for their airmen to see action. This was all very well, but few of the Central Europeans spoke any English, and they came from countries with cultures, customs and traditions very different from those of their new hosts.

The first Poles had, in fact, come to Britain on 8 December 1939 as a result of an agreement negotiated the previous October between the British and French air ministries and General Zając, the commander of the reconstituted Polish Air Force (PAF) in France. This divided the

Polish airmen currently on French soil – or making their way there from internment camps in Rumania, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania – between the RAF and the *Armée de l'Air*. The British accepted 300 pilots and 2,000 other personnel for training in the United Kingdom, and declared their intention to form two Polish bomber squadrons equipped with Fairey Battles.² The Poles volunteered partly because they were already familiar with British aero engines and partly because they thought it more likely they would see operational flying with the RAF than with the French. Among those who opted for training on bombers were a number of fighter pilots, including men of the stature of Stanislaw Skalski and Witold Urbanowicz, the future top scoring aces of the Polish Air Force.

On arrival in this country, the Poles were despatched to Eastchurch and enlisted in the RAF Volunteer Reserve; taking the necessary oath of allegiance to the King. This was later amended, under the terms of the Anglo-Polish Agreement of 5 August 1940, which afforded the PAF independent status and recognised the authority of its Inspectorate General. All of the Poles in RAFVR service were duly transferred to the new air force, and henceforth its personnel swore loyalty to the Polish Republic and were permitted to wear PAF badges on their uniforms. The Polish airmen remained, nevertheless, fully integrated within the structure of the RAF with regard to operational control, and in matters of organisation, training and discipline.³ On 17 June 1940, thirty Czechoslovak pilots, the first of their national contingent, arrived by air at Hendon. These, and all other Czechoslovak airmen, joined the RAFVR and would stay there throughout the war; largely because the Czechoslovak Air Force's (CAF) small size necessitated the support of British ground crews.⁴

The signs were not at first encouraging. Historically, the Slavs and the British had had little contact with one another and it was easy for both groups to fall back on racial stereotypes. One Czech pilot had read that the British:

‘...wore bowler hats, striped trousers, carried brief-cases and took no notice of anyone unless they were ill-treating a dog.’⁵

While a Polish flyer, interpreting their social reserve as coldness, believed that:

‘...the typical Englishman [differed] little in temperament from a fish.’⁶

It did not take long for the Slavs to discover that British people were much nicer than they had imagined, and they appreciated the genuine kindness and consideration they were shown. At the same time, some of the newcomers felt that their hosts privately considered them, in the words of one author, ‘a rung or two lower on the ladder of civilization.’⁷ By way of example, Pilot Officer Wladyslaw Nowak was invited to a lavish party, complete with orchestra, only to be asked by his well-meaning hostess if Polish people ‘lived in houses.’ Amused, he and a friend borrowed two violins and established their cultural credentials by playing a Brahms duet.⁸ It should be said that Nowak’s country had not enjoyed a good press before the war, being presented as a prickly, militaristic state given to ugly expressions of anti-Semitism. Now, however, British propaganda sentimentalised the Poles, portraying them as romantic cavaliers who fought with a primal hatred of the enemy. The Czechoslovaks for their part had been memorably dismissed by Neville Chamberlain as a people ‘in a far-away country...of whom we know nothing’; and while there may have been residual guilt in Britain at having let them down at Munich, in Whitehall, Czech refugees were viewed as politically suspect.⁹

In fairness to the British, the Central Europeans presented very real political, social and administrative problems at a time of grave national peril. At all levels the language barrier had a profound effect on interaction between the exiles and their RAF comrades, and it raised doubts about the wisdom of attempting to integrate them into Fighter Command’s sophisticated system of command and control. The authority of Polish and Czechoslovak leaders, both civil and military, had been compromised by defeat and it was by no means certain that they commanded the loyalty of their men. Worse, communists and fascists present in Slav units represented a disruptive element alarming to the British with their traditional mistrust of politicised fighting forces. These problems were compounded by the Air Ministry’s decision to commission all exiled air force officers in the lowest rank of Pilot Officer before assessing their suitability for promotion.¹⁰ Broadly speaking this arrangement favoured younger, more active men at the expense of desk-bound senior and middle-

ranking officers; leaving many of these unemployed and disaffected.¹¹ The Czechoslovaks faced an additional difficulty in that the ratio of officers to men in their contingent was, at one to five, uncommonly high. The surfeit of officers meant their promotion prospects, and those of NCOs and airmen in turn, were correspondingly poor and this affected morale.¹²

Inactivity bred indiscipline. In March 1940, a Flight Lieutenant Landau compiled a scathing report on the Poles at Eastchurch which depicted a camp riven by faction and favouritism, with officers and NCOs unable to maintain discipline over airmen preoccupied with 'matters of rank, prestige and... "having a good time."' Most worrying, it was suggested that the Poles' enthusiasm for fighting had waned.¹³ While it is likely that Landau exaggerated the extent of the malaise at Eastchurch, some of his criticisms appear to have been justified.¹⁴ The problems affecting the Czechoslovak contingent were of a different order. In July 1940, a mutiny at the Czechoslovak army camp at Cholmondeley Park was instigated by communist agitators attempting to sabotage the war effort in line with Comintern policy. The unrest spread in August to the air force units based at Honington and Duxford and, from there, to the CAF depot at Cosford. Some 450 pilots and ground staff serving at these stations drew up a list of demands which included promotion on merit rather than according to seniority or influence and an investigation into the alleged misconduct and defeatism of certain senior officers. To maintain order, Edvard Beneš, the president of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, was forced to concede the removal of General Slezák, the CAF's Commander-in-Chief, and transfer a further nine officers to the army. The unrest was only cauterised with the signing of the Anglo-Czechoslovak Agreement of 25 October 1940, which formalised the legal status, rights and responsibilities of the Czechoslovak forces in the United Kingdom. Discipline and a semblance of harmony were at length restored to the CAF, but the British found the affair deeply unsettling.¹⁵ Had they but known it, there were more sinister forces at work. Although the exiles had been screened by British Intelligence, at least one Gestapo agent, the Czech Augustin Přeučil, managed to penetrate Fighter Command and there may well have been others.¹⁶ It is perhaps understandable in this context that neither the Poles nor Czechoslovaks were initially entrusted with detailed information about

the workings of radar.

There were other issues to address. Conflict surfaced between the relatively relaxed discipline of the RAF and the harsher disciplinary codes of their allies. In theory, the Anglo-Polish and Anglo-Czechoslovak agreements left the British with the last word when dealing with serious offences committed by Slav personnel, but the exiles sometimes took matters into their own hands.¹⁷ Indeed, RAF officers at Duxford were at one point forced to intervene to prevent the execution by firing squad of a Czech pilot whose ‘crime’ had been to damage his Hurricane in a clumsy landing.¹⁸ There were also occasions when discipline broke down altogether; such as the night Northolt witnessed a full-blown fire-fight between drunken Polish airmen and a detachment of the Irish Guards in which, by some miracle, no one was killed.¹⁹ While these and other episodes were smoothed over by the RAF, they seemed to confirm the stereotype of the Slavs as difficult and a little wild.

The greatest cause for concern, however, was the state of the morale of the Polish and Czechoslovak airmen; many of whom had been twice defeated by the *Luftwaffe*. Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, AOC-in-C Fighter Command, was described as ‘extremely apprehensive about the infiltration of foreign pilots into British fighter squadrons’ because, aside from the language difficulty, he doubted their commitment and feared that their presence would have a damaging effect on the morale of his men. Instead, Dowding strongly supported the creation of separate ‘national’ squadrons for the Slavs, seeing in them a *cordon sanitaire* to isolate the contagion of defeatism he suspected they carried. He also preferred that these squadrons be deployed to the west where they could make up numbers and do no harm.²⁰ It is worthy of note that he was perfectly content for pilots from France and Belgium to serve in his command.²¹

Yet, for all the problems the Poles and Czechoslovaks faced, they were grateful to be here and they were impressed by the fortitude of the British people and the efficiency of their air force. They were, moreover, quick to contrast this with the inept organisation and widespread defeatism they had encountered while serving with the *Armée de l’Air* in France. One Czech airman, Pilot Officer Tomáš Vybíral, recorded his immediate impressions of Britain:



Seen here wearing the ribbons of the DSO and DFC awarded when he was leading the Czech Wing in 1944, Tomáš Vybiral began his RAF career as a pilot officer with No 312 (Czech) Sqn during the Battle of Britain. (RAF Museum)

‘8th August 1940, arrived in England: this is the only...country that really wants to fight. Cannot compare with what has happened in France. The RAF is the best air force ever organised.’²²

Pilot Officer Stanislav Fejfar, another young Czech, agreed,

confiding to his diary:

‘We arrive at RAF Station Cosford...the buildings..., plus the general organisation, are perfect and obviously the British are business-minded. This most certainly could not be mistaken for France.’²³ He added: ‘I just want to sit in the cockpit of a British fighter as soon as this can possibly be arranged.’²⁴

Fejfar’s last comment typifies the frustration so many of the Central Europeans felt at being, as they saw it, sidelined into attending language classes and studying King’s Regulations when they were ready and more than willing to fight. However, the RAF insisted, quite reasonably, that before being permitted to fly in combat they must first be able to understand orders and communicate intelligibly. Fortunately, the Slav pilots managed to absorb enough English to cope and, notwithstanding Dowding’s reservations, numbers of them were posted to RAF squadrons. They were warmly received by their new British and Commonwealth colleagues and Pilot Officer Ludwik Martel, a Pole who served with 54 and 603 Squadrons, spoke for many when he said:



A Hurricane of No 303 (Polish) Sqn. (Jan Koniarek)

‘I felt so well in my English squadron[s]...that I twice refused to be transferred to a Polish unit. I felt so happy among these comrades. I can honestly say that I never had such relationships ever again in my life...’²⁵

A total of 145 Poles fought in the Battle of Britain, nearly 100 of whom served with the RAF. Eighty-eight Czechoslovaks flew with them, around half in British units. The first ‘national’ fighter squadrons, Nos 310 and 312 (Czechoslovak) and Nos 302 and 303 (Polish) Sqns were formed and equipped with Hurricanes. Each was led by an RAF officer and RAF Flight Commanders with Polish or Czechoslovak deputies.²⁶ One such flight commander, Canadian Flight Lieutenant John Kent, described his disappointment at being posted to 303 Squadron:

‘...so they have posted me to – the POLISH SQUADRON – Gawd knows why and he won’t tell. I can’t speak a word of Polish and I’m in a bit of a quandary over it all. The other boys are getting a hell of a kick out of it and are laughing a lot right now.’²⁷

He and many others were to be pleasantly surprised as the Slavs set about the task of defending Britain’s airspace with courage, skill and a will to win. The first Polish victory came on 19 July when Pilot



Representative of the Poles who flew with British squadrons during the Battle of Britain, Sgt Antoni Glowacki and Plt Off Stefan Witorzeńc of No 501 Sqn. (RAF Museum)

Officer Antoni Ostowicz of 145 Squadron shared in the destruction of a Heinkel 111. Sadly, three weeks later, he became the first of his countrymen to be killed in the Battle. The first success by a national unit – a Junkers 88 – was achieved by 302 Squadron on 20 August.

On 24 August, Sergeant Antoni Glowacki of 501 Squadron despatched three Messerschmitt 109s and two Junkers 88s in three sorties becoming ‘an ace in a day.’²⁸ And, two days after that, 310 Squadron recorded its first three victories. On 30 August 303 Squadron, received its baptism of fire. The unit was on a routine training flight near Northolt, led by Squadron Leader Ronald Kellett, when Pilot Officer Ludwick Paszkiewicz spotted a formation of enemy aircraft being attacked by Hurricanes. Paszkiewicz alerted Kellett’s attention to the fight but, receiving no reply; he broke formation and shot down a Messerschmitt 110.²⁹ On landing, the Pole was brought before Northolt’s Station Commander, Group Captain



Artwork No 303 (Polish) Sqn's victory tally chalked on a Hurricane at Leconfield in October 1940. (Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum)

Stanley Vincent, who severely reprimanded him for his indiscipline and then congratulated him for his success. That evening, Paszkiewicz, deeply religious and a teetotaler, got drunk for the first time in his life. The squadron was declared operational the following day.³⁰

Though 303 Squadron served in 11 Group for only six weeks, it became the most successful Fighter Command unit in the Battle; claiming 126 victories for the loss of eight of its number killed. With 17 confirmed victories, Sergeant Josef Frantisek, also of '303', became the most successful individual pilot. Sergeant Frantisek was a Czechoslovak national who refused to observe air discipline and was therefore permitted by his Polish comrades to operate as a 'guest' of the Squadron. The Czech fought what was, in effect, a private war against the Germans until his death in a flying accident on 8 October 1940.³¹ Inevitably, 303 Squadron's phenomenal run of success

aroused suspicion, and on one occasion Group Captain Vincent followed the Poles into action to see if they were telling the truth. To his surprise, Vincent was treated to a bravura display of air fighting as the Poles took apart a large German formation over the London docks. He returned completely convinced, telling his Intelligence Officer, Flight Lieutenant Wilkins, 'that what they claimed they did, indeed, get!'³² It appears that the pilots of '303' had anticipated that their word might be doubted by their British comrades and they did their level best to submit accurate combat reports and claims.³³

No 302 Sqn was based at Duxford in 12 Group for most of the campaign, and thus saw far less action than its sister squadron to the south. The Czechoslovaks of 310 Squadron flew from the same airfield, and both fought hard when operating as part of the famous 'Duxford Wing' over London on the 15th and the 18th of September. In all, 302 Squadron claimed a total of 21 enemy aircraft destroyed in return for eight pilots killed, while '310' claimed 42 victories for the loss of four.³⁴ In common with all of the units that comprised the 'Big Wings', both squadrons appear to have been guilty of inadvertent over-claiming. This was, however, likely to occur whenever large numbers of defending fighters were deployed against enemy formations in congested airspace.³⁵ The second Czechoslovak unit, 312 Squadron, operated from Speke in 9 Group and was tasked with defending Liverpool. The squadron suffered one pilot killed and its sole victory was a Junkers 88, despatched on 8 October in a combat lasting less than eight minutes from 'scramble' to return.³⁶

The Central Europeans reinforced Fighter Command in the weeks from the middle of August to the middle of September, when the shortage of pilots had become critical and it appeared that the RAF might well lose the Battle. The statistics make interesting reading. The 145 Polish pilots, representing a little over 5% of Fighter Command's overall strength, claimed 203 German aircraft for the loss of 29 killed. This amounts to 7.5 % of the Command's total score or 1.4 enemy aircraft for every Pole engaged.³⁷ Nearly three-quarters of these men served in the front line in 11 Group, and, at the climax of the fighting, they comprised over 10% of the Group's complement. On 15 September, now celebrated as 'Battle of Britain Day', one in five of the pilots in action was Polish.³⁸ The 88 Czechoslovaks serving with British units and in the two 'national' squadrons shot down nearly 60



Pilots of No. 310 (Czechoslovak) Squadron, Duxford, September 1940. (RAF Museum)

German aircraft for eight pilots killed. Flight Lieutenant Gordon Sinclair, a Flight Commander with 310 Squadron, wrote of his comrades:

‘The Czechs were totally disciplined. They did what was expected of them, though not necessarily what they were told to do, because they knew sort of instinctively what they were supposed to do.’³⁹ He would later add: ‘I have nothing but praise for my fellow Czech pilots...I personally found it tremendously comforting in battle to have such pilots around me.’⁴⁰

Dowding admitted he was wrong about the Slavs writing:

‘I must confess that I had been a little doubtful of the effect which their experience in their own countries and in France might have had upon the Polish and Czech pilots, but my doubts were soon laid to rest, because all three squadrons (two

Polish and one Czech) swung into the fight with a dash and enthusiasm which is beyond praise. They were inspired by a burning hatred for the Germans which made them very deadly opponents.⁴¹

He would add:

‘Had it not been for the magnificent material contributed by the Polish squadrons and their unsurpassed gallantry, I hesitate to say that the outcome of the battle would have been the same.’⁴²

After an uncertain start, the RAF had trusted the Poles and Czechoslovaks and they had repaid that trust with interest. The delighted British were generous with their praise. The King visited ‘303’ at Northolt and signed their Squadron chronicle; in Cabinet it was said that: ‘the morale of the Polish pilots is excellent and their bravery much above the average’⁴³ and the British ground crews of ‘310’ took to wearing Czech buttons on their tunics. Over the summer the people of Britain took the Central Europeans to their hearts and none more so than young women. This affection was fully reciprocated, and the Poles in particular enjoyed a deserved reputation as lady-killers. In fact, their appeal to women was such that it was not unknown for British airmen to acquire Polish shoulder flashes and speak in broken English in the hope of improving their chances.

The RAF built on the success of the exiles in the Battle of Britain. Further Polish squadrons were formed and by VE Day there were 15 PAF fighter, bomber, coastal and special duties units served by a force of 14,000 men and women. Polish personnel earned a reputation for exceptional courage and devotion to duty and a total of 2,408 Polish airmen was killed in combat or in accidents. Due to recruiting difficulties, the Czechoslovak contingent remained small, with only four squadrons, but the quality of the men engaged might be summed up by the motto of 312 Squadron: ‘Not Many but Much’. Czechoslovaks served with distinction in all commands and out of 2,500 flying personnel a total of 511 gave their lives. Throughout the war, Poles and Czechoslovaks continued to serve in, and even lead, British units. To its credit, the RAF respected the cultures and traditions of its allies and it recognised their complete equality with British nationals in terms of rank, pay and career development. It is

worth making the point that this strikingly 'progressive' approach was adopted by a military arm, in the 1940s and in time of war.⁴⁴

Tragically, whereas the airmen from Western Europe returned to their homelands as liberators, the Poles, and later the Czechoslovaks, watched helplessly as their countries were taken over by the communists. Since, those that returned home risked death or imprisonment, most opted to remain in this country or to begin new lives abroad. A few hundred of the Slavs were readmitted to the peacetime RAF where some continued to serve into the 1970s.

The contribution of Polish and Czechoslovak airmen to victory in the Battle of Britain was far greater than their numbers and it is reasonable to ask why this was so. Three main factors may be identified: their training; their experience; and their motivation. Though small and poorly-equipped, the pre-war Polish Air Force boasted some of the best trained pilots in the world. Its small size meant it could be selective and, in 1935, 6,000 young men competed for 100 places at the air force's academy at Deblin.⁴⁵ The selection process was genuinely meritocratic and candidates, drawn from all classes of society, underwent a rigorous medical which eliminated all but the very best. After three months in the infantry, designed to toughen them up physically and mentally, cadets were sent to Deblin.⁴⁶ Flying training was demanding and conditions austere but, as one veteran later wrote, 'Those years...gave me a lifetime's armour plating.'⁴⁷ The cadets were, above all, taught to use their eyes so that in combat they were usually the first to see the enemy and the first to respond. During the Battle of Britain a Polish pilot explained the phenomenon:

'The British have efficient radio telephony. We had not. Therefore we had to make eyes do the work of ears.'⁴⁸

The marksmanship of PAF fighter pilots was exceptional and, for maximum effect, they were trained to fly very close to the enemy before opening fire. They also practiced flying straight at one another, only breaking at the last possible moment, as a way of gauging distance and developing nerve. Though traditionally individualistic, the Poles placed emphasis on team fighting and on the importance of going to the aid of a comrade in danger. Incidentally, Sergeant Frantisek's notorious lack of discipline was not appreciated by his

comrades who only hit on the solution of letting him fly as a guest of '303' as an option to having him posted off the squadron altogether.

The pre-war Czechoslovak Air Force was also highly selective and in 1933 only 22 cadets from the famous military academy at Hranice progressed to advanced aircrew training. The syllabus at the Central Flying School at Prostějov was divided equally between athletics, aviation theory and flying training and discipline was stern.⁴⁹ Those that stayed the exacting year-long course found themselves posted to the highly motivated and relatively competitive Czechoslovak Air Force. By the time of the Munich Crisis of September 1938, the CAF was composed of six regional Air Regiments and equipped with more than 1,500 aircraft, around 800 of which were front-line types.⁵⁰ With the German occupation in March 1939, the CAF was disbanded but 470 airmen escaped to France and were temporarily enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. A further 93 airmen, including Sergeant Frantisek, were accepted into the ranks of the Polish Air Force.⁵¹

On 1 September 1939, the PAF's 300, mostly obsolete, front-line aircraft were opposed by a *Luftwaffe* equipped with over 1,300 modern fighters and bombers. The PAF's *Eskadras* were not destroyed on the ground in the first days of the campaign, as is often asserted, but were intelligently dispersed to forward airfields located around the country. Furthermore, though equipped with obsolete PZL P.11 and P.7 fighters, the Polish pilots fought surprisingly well; and in the brief campaign managed to shoot down 126 enemy machines for the loss of 114.⁵² Following the Soviet invasion and German victory, most of the Polish airmen spent time in internment camps in Rumania, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania before escaping to France to continue the war. Once there, the Slavs were angry to discover that their French allies were inclined to treat them with disdain, disparaging their fighting skills and neglecting their welfare. They later bitterly resented the French decision to commit them haphazardly to a battle against the German *Blitzkrieg* which they appeared unable or unwilling to fight themselves. Nevertheless, the exiles' superior training and that most precious commodity, combat experience, stood them in good stead. The Czechoslovak airmen performed well during the Battle of France claiming 157 victories in return for 28 killed.⁵³ A fair proportion of these would, however, have been counted as 'probable' or 'shared' victories by the RAF. Though only engaged in the latter part of the

campaign, 130 Polish pilots destroyed 60 German aircraft and suffered 13 killed.

By the time they reached this country, the Slav airmen had undergone what has been characterised as a process of ‘natural selection.’ In other words, those that had experienced *Blitzkrieg* twice, and survived, clearly had something going for them. Of course, flying within the constraints of the ‘Dowding System’ was more demanding than anything they had experienced hitherto, and their poor English impeded their progress.⁵⁴ The British also found it very difficult to get the Poles to observe correct R/T procedures ‘especially when excited.’⁵⁵ The novelty of Imperial rather than metric measurements and aircraft with constant speed propellers and retractable undercarriages caused, in addition, a number of minor accidents. Despite these problems, it was apparent that the exiles under training were very good and that they were flying their aircraft to the limit.

The Slav veterans knew they were good. Often older than their RAF comrades, nearly all were fully trained and each had an average of 500 hours flying.⁵⁶ They brought to this country valuable ‘corporate knowledge’ of the business of air fighting, and with it a touch of arrogance. This was encapsulated in the Czech phrase *Všecko známe-všude jsme byli*, which translates as ‘We’ve been everywhere – we know everything.’⁵⁷ Some of the Polish veterans meanwhile took to calling their RAF instructors ‘ostriches’ because they considered they underestimated the nature of the German threat.⁵⁸ The exiles were particularly contemptuous of the RAF’s outmoded battle formations and tactics. Rather than adopting the inflexible parade ground ‘Vic’ they had learned to fly in more open formations which freed each man to watch out for the enemy. Their tactics were also more versatile, and more deadly, than the RAF’s cumbrous Fighting Area Attacks.⁵⁹ These evolved throughout the Battle, and, for example, the defensive circles flown of necessity by Messerschmitt 110 pilots were studied and methods of breaking them devised.⁶⁰ Trained to get in close, Polish airmen made the most of their battery of rifle-calibre machine guns; and all of the Hurricanes on 303 Squadron had their guns harmonised to converge at 200 yards rather than the standard RAF spread of 400 yards or the 250 yards favoured by more astute British pilots.⁶¹ It should be added that while the Poles fought with aggression they were far from the suicidal cavaliers of legend. They had both the confidence and the



'Some of the airmen preferred to cover their faces when being photographed'. This is Fg Off Kazimierz Daszewski of No 303 (Polish) Squadron in April 1941. (RAF Museum)

expertise to take calculated risks but they were not reckless. This is borne out by the fact that during the Battle 302 and 303 Squadrons each lost only eight pilots; a figure nearly 70 % lower than that of most RAF units.⁶²

It was not only in the air that the Poles excelled, for PAF ground personnel were highly skilled and their dedication, efficiency and capacity for hard work made for high rates of serviceability on the two 'national' squadrons. The ground crews' own finest hour came after the fighting on 15 September, when 303 Squadron's Flying Officer Wiorkiewicz and his team managed overnight to restore nine apparently un-repairable Hurricanes for the next day's operations.⁶³

As for motivation, the contribution of the Polish and Czechoslovak airmen must be seen against the backdrop of the Nazi occupation of Europe and its attendant horrors. The exiles received enough information from their homelands to know that those they loved lived under constant threat of arrest, deportation and execution. To protect their families, there was a strict ban on publishing the exiles' names and some of the airmen preferred to cover their faces when being photographed. The German plan was for Poland to be wiped from the

map and its people to act as slaves until their eventual elimination as a race in about 1975. Poland lost 6.5 million souls or 20% of its total population. This was the highest proportion inflicted on any of the combatant nations. Warsaw alone suffered 700,000 dead, which was more than the death toll of the UK and USA combined.⁶⁴ After the war, one Polish writer commented:

‘The Germans worked long and hard to impart to the Poles an emotion largely alien to their character – hate. They succeeded in the end.’⁶⁵

Czechoslovakia suffered less in comparison, but in excess of 350,000 people were killed by the Germans; most infamously the entire populations of the villages of Lidice and Lezaky. The Germans’ long-term aim was to deport and eventually murder most of the Czechoslovak population.⁶⁶

Hate drove some of the Slavs to shoot German airmen in their parachutes. On 31 August, Squadron Leader Alexander Hess of 310 Squadron attacked a Dornier 17 which crash-landed near Epping Forest. He had recently received the news that his wife and daughter had been killed by the Germans so he followed it down, determined to finish off the crew. Three Germans emerged from the wreckage who, on seeing him, held up their hands. He told a comrade:

‘I hesitate, then it was too late, so I go round again to make sure I kill them – they wave something white – again I do not shoot – then I think it is no use – I am become too bloody British!’⁶⁷

For all the pain and suffering the exiles had experienced few of them doubted that God was on their side. On 27 September Ludwick Paszkiewicz was killed. His friend, Pilot Officer Jan Zumbach, ordinarily a cynic with a caustic wit, wrote:

‘He gave his life high up there, somewhere, where earthly matters are so distant, the rays of the sun so pure and God so close.’⁶⁸

On 2 September 1940, 303 Squadron was involved in a combat near Dover in which one pilot, Sergeant Jan Rogowski, demonstrated the qualities that set the Central European airmen apart. According to the Combat Report, the squadron was patrolling at 19,000 feet when



Sgt Josef Frantisek. The Czech who flew with the Poles.

Rogowski saw a formation of nine Messerschmitt 109s at 22,000 feet diving on them out of the sun. Instantly assessing the situation, he delivered a head on attack which broke and dispersed the Germans. In a fierce action over the Channel, Rogowski and Sergeant Frantisek each shot down a Messerschmitt, Pilot Officer Henneberg probably destroyed another and Pilot Officer Feric damaged a fourth. In doing so, Feric's engine was disabled, and, shutting it down, he prepared to attempt to glide back across the sea to England. Sergeant

Rogowski immediately took station as his escort. Both were in turn covered by other pilots until Feric was able to effect a forced landing at Eythorne. Typically, it was a Pole that saw the enemy first; the RAF officers leading the squadron are not mentioned in the report. Typically, Rogowski had the courage, the skill and the confidence to take a calculated risk which, on this occasion, paid off handsomely. Typically, he then made the most of his advantage, shooting down a Messerschmitt himself while the others successfully engaged the enemy. And, typically, he stayed with a stricken comrade until he was sure he was safe. '303's' Intelligence Officer, Flying Officer Hadwan, was suitably impressed, writing:

'The Polish pilots showed up very well in this action, working in intelligent combination and pressing their attack right home. Sgt Rogowski deserves special commendation for his quick and courageous attack which probably saved the Squadron from what might have been a disastrous surprise.'⁶⁹

It would be easy to characterise Jan Rogowski and his comrades as supermen, but this was far from the case. They were, however, highly trained, highly experienced and highly motivated professionals at the height of their powers. In difficult circumstances, the RAF recognised the calibre of the men serving with them and it should be congratulated for giving them their head. The Slavs in turn appreciated



Fg Off Zdzislaw Henneberg, Flt Lt John Kent and Fg Off Marian Pisarek, No 303 (Polish) Sqn, Leconfield, October 1940 (RAF Museum)

the RAF, which, according to veterans, was efficient, fair and understanding of their needs. The air force was truly meritocratic and it is enough to say that it encouraged the best and the brightest of two principled, courageous and resourceful peoples to participate fully in the defence of Britain's territorial integrity and of what remained of European civilisation. Let the last words be those of John Kent, who had been reluctant to serve with the Poles. On leaving '303' he added the following to the Squadron Chronicle:

'Best wishes and all the luck in the world. To the finest Squadron in the whole world, and with profound thanks for keeping me alive and teaching me to fight...'⁷⁰

He appears to have meant it for not long after he broke the nose of a British Army officer unwise enough to refuse to stand for the Polish national anthem.

Notes:

¹ Zamoyski, Adam; *The Forgotten Few: the Polish Air Force in the Second World War* (John Murray, 1995), p66.

² The first two PAF bomber units, Nos 300 and 301 (Polish) Squadrons, were formed at Bramcote on 1 and 22 July 1940 respectively. It was initially believed that Polish airmen were unsuitable for training as fighter pilots because their fighting spirit had been damaged by defeat in 1939.

³ Cynk, Jerzy B; *The Polish Air Force at War: the Official History: Volume One, 1939-1943* (Schiffer Military History, 1998), pp150-152. Michael Alfred Peszke discusses the legal status of the PAF in 'The Polish Air Force in the United Kingdom, 1939-1946', *Air Power Review*, Volume 11 Number 3 (2008).

⁴ The first part of this paper draws heavily on chapters Two and Three of Alan Brown's study of the evolution of British policy towards the Allied air forces, *Airmen in Exile: the Allied Air Forces in the Second World War* (Sutton Publishing, 2000).

⁵ Čapka, Flight Lieutenant Jo; *Red Sky at Night*, (Anthony Blond, 1958), p56

⁶ Zamoyski, *op cit*, p57.

⁷ *Ibid*, p58.

⁸ I am indebted to Krysia D Michna-Nowak, daughter of the late Squadron Leader Wladyslaw Jan Nowak, for this anecdote.

⁹ Brown, *op cit*, pp84-86.

¹⁰ TNA AIR2/6053: Polish Units Employed with the RAF - Rank on Entry and Promotion of Officers.

¹¹ Zamoyski, *op cit*, p65.

¹² Brown, *op cit*, p 43 & 92.

¹³ TNA AIR2/4213: Report by Flight Lieutenant Landau, 29 March 1940; Landau's findings are discussed in Brown, *Ibid.*, pp30-32.

¹⁴ TNA AIR2/7196: Minute by Wing Commander C Porri, 24 May 1940. This offers a more sympathetic assessment of the Poles and their disciplinary and organisational problems and concludes: 'I cannot help feeling that there must, in the present crisis, be a growing feeling of impatience and unrest amongst so large a body of men whose aim in coming here was to help the Allied cause.... and who at this crucial moment find themselves limited to such duties as foot drill, guarding the station, lectures etc.'

¹⁵ Royal Air Force Museum (RAFM) X005-0968: Interview of Squadron Leader Miroslav Antonin Liskutin covering the period 1928-1973; Liskutin, Squadron Leader Miroslav; *Challenge in the Air: a Spitfire Pilot Remembers* (William Kimber, 1988), p66; Brown, *op cit*, pp91-95.

¹⁶ Liskutin, p67. On 18 September 1941, Sergeant Přeučil escaped to occupied Belgium in a Hurricane of 55 Operational Training Unit. Přeučil provided information about Czechoslovak personnel for his Gestapo handlers and was later employed as an informer and agent-provocateur in prisoner of war and concentration camps. He was tried and hanged for his crimes in Prague in 1947.

¹⁷ TNA AIR2/5162: Proposed Agreement with Czechoslovakian Authorities on Employment of Air Personnel in RAFVR. Letter from Mr M. Ripka of the Czechoslovak Provisional Government to Mr William Strang of the Foreign Office, 10 October 1940. See also Anglo-Polish Agreement, 5 August, 1940: Article 4,

included in Cynk, Jerzy B; *The Polish Air Force at War: the Official History: Volume Two, 1943-1945* (Schiffer Military History, 1998), Appendix 10, p619.

¹⁸ TNA FO371/24373: Loose minute of the Allied Administration Committee, June 1940, quoted in Brown, *op cit*, Note 2, p19. This lists the extensive number of crimes that caused the death penalty in the Polish and Czechoslovak forces; Gelb, Norman; *Scramble: a Narrative History of the Battle of Britain* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), pp48-50.

¹⁹ Vincent, Air Vice-Marshal Stanley F; *Flying Fever* (Jarrolds, 1972), pp101-102.

²⁰ TNA AIR2/5196: Employment of Surplus Polish and Czech Fighter Pilots in Fighter Command; Minute by Air Vice-Marshal William Sholto Douglas, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, 29 July 1940.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² RAFM X003-6084/213: Diary of Pilot Officer Tomáš Vybiral; entry for 8 August 1940.

²³ Franks, Norman with Muggleton, Simon (ed); *A Fighter Pilot's Call to Arms: Defending Britain and France Against the Luftwaffe, 1940-42* (Grub Street, 2010), p87. I am indebted to Mr Muggleton and Mr Franks for generously allowing me to quote from Pilot Officer Fejfar's diary before its publication.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p88.

²⁵ Zamoyski, *op cit*, p75. See also Olson, Lynne and Cloud, Stanley; *For Your Freedom and Ours: the Kościuszko Squadron: Forgotten Heroes of World War II* (William Heinemann, 2003), pp103-105; and RAFM X005-0968: Interview of Squadron Leader Miroslav Antonin Liskutin covering the period 1928-1973.

²⁶ The two Czechoslovak fighter squadrons engaged in the Battle of Britain, Nos 310 and 312 Sqns, were established at Duxford on 10 July and 29 August 1940 respectively. The first Polish fighter unit, No 302 (Poznanski) Sqn, was formed at Leconfield on 13 July, while No 303 (Warsaw-Kościuszko) Sqn formed at Northolt on 2 August.

²⁷ RAFM X002-5661: Typescript diary of Flight Lieutenant John A Kent; entry for 25 July 1940.

²⁸ RAFM DB190: Pilot's flying log book of Sergeant Antoni Glowacki, 1940-1945.

²⁹ TNA AIR27/1663: RAF Form 540, Operations Record Book for No 303 Sqn; 1940-1941. Gretzyngier, Robert; *Poles in Defence of Britain, July 1940-June 1941* (Grub Street, 2001), pp45-47. Pilot Officer Paszkiewicz claimed a Dornier 17 but parts of the Messerschmitt 110 he in fact destroyed are held by the RAF Museum.

³⁰ Olson and Cloud, *op cit*, pp125-126; Zumbach, Squadron Leader Jan; *On Wings of War: My Life as a Pilot Adventurer* (Andre Deutsch, 1975), p68.

³¹ Deighton, Len; *Fighter: the True Story of the Battle of Britain* (Jonathan Cape, 1977), pp 193-4, 279.

³² Vincent, *op cit*, p96.

³³ After extensive research, Mr Richard King, places 303 Squadron's actual total at 76 enemy aircraft destroyed. He attributes the disparity to the inadvertent duplication of victories in the heat of combat compounded by poor aircraft recognition and the Poles' ignorance of English geography. I am indebted to Mr King for his kindness and generosity in sharing this and other information before the publication of his excellent

303 Squadron: 303 (Polish) Squadron Battle of Britain Diary (Red Kite, 2010).

³⁴ Cynk, Volume Two, *op cit*, Appendix 15, p633; Listemann, Phil H (ed); *No 310 (Czechoslovak) Squadron, 1940-1945* (Tomas Polak and Phil H Listemann, 2006), pp 8-15.

³⁵ Gretzyngier, *op cit*, pp89-90, 105.

³⁶ TNA AIR27/1691: RAF Form 540, Operations Record Book for No 312 Sqn, 1940-1941; Smith, David J; *Action Stations 3: Military Airfields of Wales and the North-West* (Patrick Stephens, 1990), p173.

³⁷ Cynk, Volume One, *op cit*, pp192-194. Mr Cynk makes the point that the figure of 203 enemy aircraft destroyed by the PAF was based on the estimate of 2,692 Fighter Command victories calculated in 1942. In 1947 this figure was reduced to 1,733 in the light of information gleaned from captured German documents but, with the disbandment of the PAF, the Polish figure was never officially reassessed. Mr Cynk suggests that it is reasonable to reduce the total Polish score by the same proportion, ie to 131 enemy aircraft confirmed destroyed.

³⁸ Cynk, Volume One, *op cit*, pp 192-195; Olson and Cloud, *op cit*, p151.

³⁹ Gelb, *op cit*, p49.

⁴⁰ Sarkar, Dilip; *Battle of Britain: Last Look Back* (Ramrod Publications, 2002), p149.

⁴¹ Despatch from ACM Sir Hugh Dowding to the Air Council, 20 August 1941, quoted in Gretzyngier, Robert and Matusiak, Wojtek; *Polish Aces of World War 2* (Osprey Publishing, 1998), p26. Dowding however concluded: 'Other Poles and Czechs were used in small numbers in British squadrons and fought very gallantly, but the language was a difficulty and they were probably most efficiently employed in their own national units.'

⁴² Zamoyski, *op cit*, p97.

⁴³ TNA CAB66/12/14: Chiefs of Staff Committee: Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, Ninth Weekly Report, 25 September 1940.

⁴⁴ Brown, *op cit*, pp12-13. This sets out the five (surprisingly enlightened) principles which governed the Air Ministry's relations with the allied contingents serving in or with the RAF during the Second World War.

⁴⁵ Zamoyski, *op cit*, p12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Zumbach, *op cit*, p42.

⁴⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 25 October 1940.

⁴⁹ RAFM X003-6084/151: Vrana, Flight Lieutenant Ada; *Life-long Reminiscences of My Dearest Friend Tomáš Vybíral*, pp1-2.

⁵⁰ Hurt, Zdeněk; *Czechs in the RAF in Focus* (Red Kite, 2004), p6. In September 1938, the Czechoslovak Air Force was equipped with 326 Avia B.534 biplane fighters, 155 light, medium and heavy bombers of mixed Czechoslovak, French and Soviet manufacture and about 320 reconnaissance machines, mostly Letov Š.328s.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Pezke, Michael Alfred; *Poland's Military Aviation, September 1939: It Never Had a Chance*, in Robin Higham and Stephen J. Harris (ed.) *Why Air Forces Fail: the Anatomy of Defeat* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), Chapter One. See also

Cynk, Volume One, *op cit*, Chapter One. Both Mr Pezke and Mr Cynk highlight the achievement of the Polish fighter pilots in destroying so many enemy aircraft while flying inferior machines and operating without the benefit of an integrated air defence system. Mr Cynk also states that the PAF pilots underestimated the number of their victories.

⁵³ Listemann, *op cit*, p6.

⁵⁴ The language barrier could also prove dangerous and during the Battle at least one Polish pilot was lynched by angry civilians who mistook him for a German; see Bickers, Richard Townshend; *Friendly Fire: Accidents in Battle from Ancient Greece to the Gulf War* (Leo Cooper, 1994), pp71-72.

⁵⁵ RAFM MFC77/16/25: Air Ministry Form 1180 for Hurricane W9147, 18 September 1941. The Gestapo agent, Augustin Přeučil, was at the controls of this aircraft and contrived his escape to Belgium after pretending to crash into the North Sea during a practice dogfight with a Polish sergeant pilot. The Pole's use of the R/T was indirectly criticised by the Court of Inquiry.

⁵⁶ Lisiewicz; Squadron Leader M (ed); *Destiny Can Wait: the Polish Air Force in the Second World War* (William Heinemann, 1949), p 52.

⁵⁷ Darlington, Roger; *Night Hawk: the Biography of Flight Lieutenant Karel Kuttelwascher DFC, the RAF's Greatest Night Intruder Ace* (William Kimber, 1985), p39.

⁵⁸ Zamoryski, *op cit*, p58.

⁵⁹ Olson and Cloud, *op cit*, pp145-146.

⁶⁰ Cynk, Volume One, *op cit*, p190.

⁶¹ Interview with Wing Commander Ronald Kellet, *The City of London Squadron Magazine*, 1965.

⁶² Zamoyski, *op cit*, p 92.

⁶³ Collier, Richard; *Eagle Day: the Battle of Britain, August 6-September 15, 1940* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), p261.

⁶⁴ Dear, I C B and Foot, M R D (ed); *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War* (OUP, 1995), p896.

⁶⁵ *Destiny Can Wait, op cit*, p61.

⁶⁶ *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, pp279-280.

⁶⁷ Sarkar, Dilip; *The Few: the Story of the Battle of Britain in the Words of the Pilots* (Amberley, 2009), p173.

⁶⁸ Olson and Cloud, *op cit*, p154.

⁶⁹ RAFM: Intelligence Patrol Report for No.303 (Polish) Squadron, 2 September 1940.

⁷⁰ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum A.V.49/34/4: 303 Squadron Chronicle, 7 April 1941.

ALLIES AT WAR: THE RAF AND THE WESTERN EUROPEAN ALLIES

Stuart Hadaway



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More than a dozen European¹ countries were represented in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, totalling over 30,000 personnel (see Figure 1). Two thirds of them came from Eastern Europe, notably Poland (nearly half the overall total), but men and women also came from the length and breadth of the continent, from colonies across the globe, and neutral countries where expatriates had taken up residence. Some 10,000 or so personnel came from Western Europe. The largest contingent was the French, especially as the Vichy domains in Africa were slowly liberated. With some of these exiles came political strife that would cast a shadow over many of them, but overall theirs would be a significant contribution towards the final victory.

The Air Ministry and the Foreign Office would spend a considerable amount of their time throughout the war placating, pleading and generally politicking with the allied governments in exile. A good deal of liaison work had been carried out with the French, and later Norwegians, in the early months of the war, although approaches to the Netherlands and Belgium had been firmly rebuffed on the grounds of their neutrality. With the Belgians in particular, this would later cause resentment that would take a long time to dispel.² An Allied Military Commission had been established to liaise between the Allied nations, but in July 1940, with the rest of Europe fallen, this was disbanded and the Air Ministry set up its own organisation: The

	Aircrew Officers	Airmen Aircrew	Ground Officers	NCOs & Airmen	WAAF's	Airmen under training	Total ¹
USA	60	30					90
Belgium	306	169	57	702		331	1,565
China	4						4
Czechoslovakia	323	391	104	711		23	1,552
Denmark	13	4					17
France	463	1,321	105	2,464		150 ²	4,503
Greece	13	21	434	4,000		388 ²	4,856
Netherlands	174	316	17	279		550	1,336
Iran	7						7
Norway	147	440	187	1,060		60 ²	1,894
Poland	1,280	1,961	869	7,668	1,040	891	13,709
Russia	4	1					5
Switzerland	2						2
Turkey	113						113
Yugoslavia	105	48	28	500		25	706
Sweden	2						2
						Total	30,361

NB No data available for WAAF Officers, aircrew under training or casualty figures.

1. Total reflects all fields toted (with exclusions noted above).
2. As at 1 September 1944.

Fig 1. Approximate numbers of foreign personnel enlisted in, or serving alongside, the wartime RAF.

Source: RAF Personnel Statistics for the period 3 Sep 39 - 1 Sep 45
(RAF Museum Ref: 012885)

Directorate of Allied Air Co-Operation (DAAC).³

The DAAC, under the Directorship of Air Cdre (later Air Chf Mshl Sir) Charles Medhurst, initially consisted of seven sections.⁴ Four looked after specific foreign contingents, while further sections were responsible for security and intelligence (primarily interviewing newly arrived Europeans to sift for spies and fifth columnists) one for record keeping and interpreting, and finally a unit inspectorate. Each national section was under a squadron leader, although in October the Polish Section head was increased to a wing commander, to reflect the large numbers of Poles serving with the RAF.

Other sections were added as new needs arose (see Figure 2). In August a Flying Training Section was created to oversee the operational training and conversion of foreign aircrew to RAF equipment types, standards and procedures. A Technical Training Section was also added, partly to oversee the training of the small

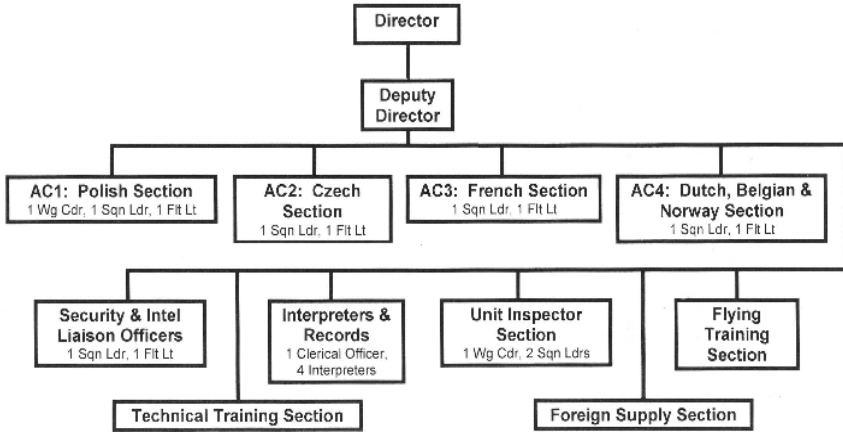


Fig 2. Directorate of Allied Air Co-Operation, 1940.

numbers of ground crews who had escaped the continent, but also to supervise the translation and printing of RAF manuals and other training material into the relevant languages. These seem mostly to have been aircrew orientated, however, as distinct from technical manuals for ground crews. The idea was to teach all personnel sufficient English to permit them to use standard texts, although these efforts were not particularly well organised in the early days.⁵ By the end of the year accountants had also been brought in to help deal with the financial issues arising, such as rates of pay, and, (along with the, also new, Foreign Supply Section), what equipment was needed by whom, and who should pay for what.⁶

Right from the first day, the DAAC was beset with pressing issues. Politics ran every which way throughout the assembling foreign air contingents. Most clamoured to fight under their own flags and direction, a demand which the Air Ministry, with the exceptions of Poland and Norway, rightly refused, since the lack of central control would have resulted in chaos. Instead, the foreign nationals were enlisted into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, where a degree of uniformity and control could be imposed. This required the resolution of many complex issues including the reconciliation of national and RAF Service law, variations in pay rates and often markedly different rank structures. Establishing a clear correlation

between the ranks of the various air forces, where some ranks did not have exact equivalents, and the differing levels at which responsibilities and powers were held within each rank structure was no easy task. Furthermore, there were internal struggles for political control within each national contingent, and inter-Service rivalries between, for instance, the separate army and naval air forces sponsored by the Netherlands and France, whose regulations and pay were, again, different. Nations vied with each other for attention, priority and concessions, all made worse by the need to salve their wounded pride at their recent defeats and exile status.

The British Government struggled to deal with these issues while also keeping their full attention on the opening phases of the Battle of Britain. It was a difficult balancing act and, unfortunately, insensitivity or thoughtlessness did occasionally mar the proceedings. For instance, on 17 July 1940 the Foreign Office received a report of discontent within the Norwegian Government in exile. A valuable ally, if only for the large amounts of shipping that they had at their disposal, they felt that they were being ignored. A member of staff from the Ministry of Shipping reported:

‘The Norwegian Government realised how busy all the members of the British Government must be and that therefore they had studiously refrained from worrying them over small matters although there were many little things that they would gladly welcome if such were offered to them by the British Government on their own initiative.

[Mr Lie, Norwegian Ministry of Supply,] mentioned, in parenthesis, that Poland seemed to be able to get a lot of special privileges because they kept asking for them. On the other hand, the Norwegians did not want to keep on asking for things because of the British Government’s preoccupation.’⁷

Clearly, aggrieved that, although they were trying to be considerate guests, they were in fact being penalised for their good behaviour, the Norwegians wrote to the Air Ministry to complain. Its reply, ten days later, attempted to be reassuring but employed a distinctly inappropriate turn of phrase. ‘We are now trying’, they said,

‘to work out a comprehensive scheme of privileges and



'Training would take some time' – a Battle Trainer of No 304 (Polish) Sqn in 1940.

immunities for all foreign governments in this country on an equal footing, which we hope will put an end to these grievances. We shall certainly not treat the Norwegians any worse than the others.'⁸

This was far more likely to have been an unthinking mistake rather than a statement of intent to treat all foreigners equally badly but, either way, it perhaps shows at this stage a less than considerate attitude towards their guests. And it may be no wonder. As yet, the Allied air contingents were being somewhat more trouble than they were immediately worth. Training and re-equipping the Allies would take time, even after the legal and diplomatic issues had been sorted out. Conceivably, even while individual pilots or even flights were joining operational RAF squadrons, and a few complete Allied squadrons were being formed, the bulk of the foreign air forces would not be ready for use for some months, probably not until 1941. However, with the Germans poised to invade, the British Government could not afford to take the long view.

At this time the Air Ministry, and the Foreign Office, were being bombarded with requests for everything from the establishment of fully independent air contingents, to clarifications over the payment of income tax.⁹ The French, under General De Gaulle, were a particularly demanding group. Of course, a long history of Anglo-French rivalry existed, and there was still considerable resentment that the British had not done all that some Frenchmen believed they could have done

during the Battle of France. Strangely, De Gaulle was never one of these, although the Royal Navy's attack on the French fleet at Mers-El-Kabir in early July 1940 certainly soured his private opinions (publicly, he supported the British action).¹⁰ He now believed that French pride and honour rested solely on his shoulders. Often comparing himself to Joan of Arc, he set out to win prestige for his Free French forces. But questions remained to be answered, notably: what legal status did De Gaulle actually have, when, unlike the other Allied nations, France still existed as an independent, albeit shrunken, country? So, while De Gaulle argued about issues of jurisdiction, such as, who was allowed to enforce discipline and administer punishments to French personnel, it was far from clear whether he was actually eligible to do these things himself.¹¹ His claims, also made by other countries, that French troops should be subject to diplomatic immunity came to nothing, although some discussion followed to establish where this particular privilege did actually apply.¹² In August, 1940, the issue of whether French military vehicles should be taxed and insured before use on British roads also saw fierce debate.¹³ These may seem like trivial points, but they are just a few of the hundreds of administrative, legal, diplomatic, practical and organisational issues that the Foreign Office, Air Ministry, War Office and Admiralty were obliged to address.

Perhaps more important were fundamental issues such as: what were the Allied air forces to be used for, and by whom? France, Belgium and the Netherlands all had overseas territories, albeit those of France were for the most part loyal to the new Vichy regime. While these could be a source of new personnel and, hopefully, financial support for the exiled forces, all to a certain extent were under threat; the Belgian Congo by internal unrest, and the Dutch East Indies by imminent Japanese expansionism in the Pacific. The Air Ministry feared that men and equipment might be siphoned off, or even sent wholesale to protect these colonies rather than being used in the main war effort against Germany,¹⁴ or that the Allied governments would at least insist on their forces being used only for narrowly defined tasks directly relating to the liberation of their countries.¹⁵ Agreements had to be made as to how the exiled forces were to be employed, an issue at least partly anticipated and deflected by the Air Ministry's insistence that foreign personnel be enlisted in the RAFVR. Still, the

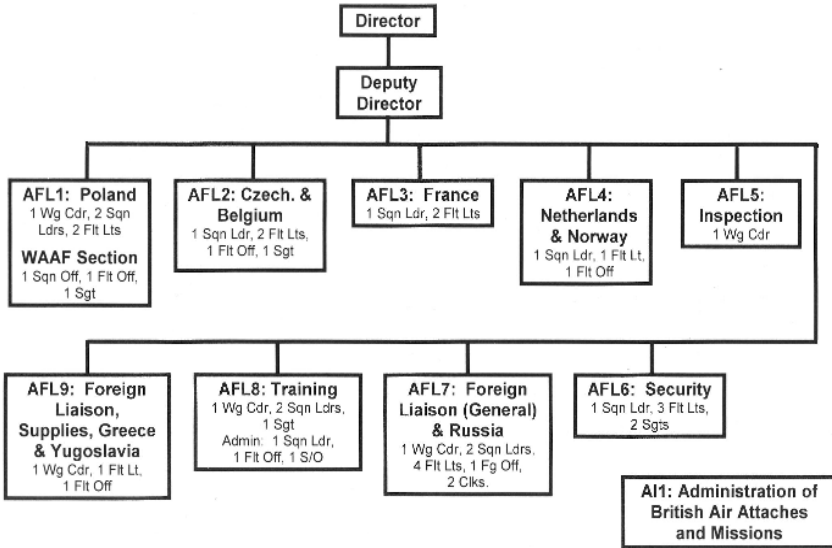


Fig 3. Directorate of Allied Air Co-Operation and Foreign Liaison, 1944.

possible supply of reinforcements from colonies, or not as the case may be, caused some strife, and became a source of political leverage.

Nevertheless, these contentious issues were gradually resolved and by 1941 the Western European Allies had established a broadly workable, if not exactly smooth, relationship.

In the middle of 1941 the DAAC became the Directorate of Allied Air Co-Operation and Foreign Liaison (DAFL).¹⁶ It would continue to grow (see Figure 3), liaison with Yugoslavia, Greece and the Soviet Union being included in 1941 and from 1943 foreign sections of the WAAF (or *Corps Feminin* as it was known to the French) began to be established. By 1944 the DAFL was the official body controlling, not only liaison with and between the Allied Air Forces, but also overseeing their training, equipment and administration. They also supervised British Air Attachés to foreign nations, and foreign Air Attachés in the UK.¹⁷

The numbers of Allied personnel had grown from just over 10,000 in the summer of 1940, to nearly 30,000 and some 57 squadrons in 1944.¹⁸ Since the DAFL had only around fifty staff,¹⁹ it is little



The refugee air forces added some exotic types to the RAF's inventory, like the Iceland-based Northrop N-3PB floatplanes of No 330 (Norwegian) Sqn.

wonder that confusion occasionally occurred. In January, 1944, for example, the posting of a Norwegian pilot to No 138 Sqn at Tempsford was blocked because it was apparently against policy to employ foreign nationals on special duties units.²⁰ HQ Bomber Command's polite response enquired, that if that really was the case, what should be done about the six Norwegian aircrew who were already at Tempsford serving with No 161 Sqn?²¹ It was decided that they could remain, but only on attachment, and that no further foreign personnel would be posted to either of the Special Duties squadrons.

By the spring of 1942, the Allies had, nominally at least, reached agreement as to how the system should work. Most Allied personnel came under direct RAF control, and those contingents which had been given independent status – the Polish and Norwegian Air Forces – had also agreed to act in co-operation with the RAF towards their common goals, even if these common goals were occasionally kept slightly obscured. For example, the agreement with the Norwegians included a promise to liberate and restore their country, a statement conspicuous by its absence from the agreement with the Poles.²² Everyone was, within reason, allowed to exploit their own forces for propaganda purposes, to boost the prestige which was so vital to the exiled governments. To many of these defeated nations, their air forces promised a quick and glamorous way to show that their defeat was not

absolute, and a way to keep hope and pride alive. Meanwhile, any problems, requests or ideas between the air forces were to be aired in open discussion without prejudice.²³

Needless to say, for a variety of reasons, the system did not always run smoothly. Over the summer of 1943, for example, trouble began brewing with the Belgian contingent. A DAFL report observed that the Belgians were currently organised into three distinct groups: a Belgian headquarters and depot in the UK; the Belgian section of the RAFVR and a force in the Belgian Congo. It was proposed, in exchange for an inspectorate and a national depot, that this system should be streamlined by subsuming them all into the RAFVR. This would make for a much more efficient system. For example, at the time of the report, it was thought that some 200 personnel (it was later discovered that there were 250) were currently standing idle in the Congo, whereas gainful employment could easily be found for them in Europe. Hopefully the new system could impose some order on the Belgians:

‘The total personnel of the three sections is only about 1,200, but owing to petty intrigue, personal jealousies and the lack of a co-ordinating Head, the problems attached to them and the administrative and organising work entailed is out of all proportion to their size.’²⁴

The Air Ministry believed that the personnel in the Congo,²⁵ who had been trained in South Africa, were being retained for reasons of political prestige. The Belgians had no aircraft, but were asking for, initially, six Oxfords for use as air ambulances within their colony, and for eighteen Hudsons or Sunderlands for coastal patrols. Clearly these aircraft were unnecessary, especially the latter. The Congo was well to the south of the Battle of the Atlantic and maritime patrol aircraft were desperately needed, as were the 250 personnel, where it *was* being fought further north. A terse series of letters full of veiled, and not-so-veiled, implications and accusations were exchanged regarding what aircraft were actually needed in the Congo and where the Belgian aircrew could best be employed. The Air Ministry perceived this to be a blatant case of the Belgian authorities wishing to boost their prestige and improve their powerbase to the detriment of the overall war effort. When the CAS, Sir Charles Portal, first

requested that these personnel be sent to Europe, on the grounds that they were unemployed, the Belgian Prime Minister, M Hubert Pierlot, responded that if Portal sent him the aircraft he had asked for, they would no longer be unemployed.²⁶

In August, 1943, after more than a month of wrangling, Portal finally agreed to provide the six Oxfords, but he flatly refused to send any other aircraft, especially maritime patrol types. He all but *demand*ed that the personnel not required to operate the Oxfords should be sent to Europe, where he was 'sure that they will do very good service.'²⁷ Pierlot partially relented. Gratefully receiving the Oxfords, he decided that they would need 148 of the 250 personnel to operate them. While he would gladly send the 102 remaining men to Europe, that would actually break their terms of enlistment so he could do no more than ask for volunteers.²⁸ Over the next three months, twenty officers from the Congo contingent did volunteer to serve in Europe, while another 102 Belgian nationals made their own way to the UK.²⁹ These latter men enlisted straight into the RAFVR, where two Belgian fighter squadrons were already winning an enviable reputation for themselves.

Meanwhile, by 1942 the Air Ministry had developed five broad 'principles' for dealings with and between the Allied Air Forces. These were published as the Air Ministry's *de facto* 'Mission Statement' on the treatment of the Allied air forces.³⁰

Nationality

The first principle, that of Nationality, protected the national identity of each of the Allies and allowed them to maintain their own culture and traditions. Although the wearing of national uniforms on duty was a hotly contested issue, the wearing of national 'flashes' and air crew brevets was both allowed and encouraged.³¹ Where squadrons had been established with the aim of containing personnel all from the same country, a certain leeway was allowed in the naming of the unit, in the design of its badge, and in the unofficial markings which they could apply to their aircraft. The odd conflict in this area did arise, such as over the question of flying badges. Some of the Allied air forces were keen to present their national pilot's brevets to British personnel as a token of respect or admiration. This was seen by some as upsetting and undercutting the carefully established system of



A Spitfire V of No 316 (Czechoslovak) Sqn in 1943.

awarding Allied decorations to British personnel and vice-versa, and in early 1943 the issue was laid before the Air Council for final decision. Its view was that flying badges should not be exchanged. Unfortunately, their decision was not expressed in the most diplomatic of terms:

‘The Allies like to pretend that their flying badges are awards rather than symbols of qualification, but there is no reason why we should subscribe to such fictions... The Allies must know by now that our ideas about awards are very different from theirs and that we are not prepared to come into line with foreign practices. Instead of accepting their standards, we should try to educate them up to ours.’³²

Legality.

The Principle of Legality dealt with the reconciliation of British and Allied service laws, since it was unacceptable that personnel serving side by side should be subject to different sets of regulations and punishments. As members of the RAFVR, the British felt that Air Force Law should apply, although many of the Allies tried to retain some control over the matter. After all, it was unfair for Allied personnel to be subject to legislation with which, initially at least, they were unfamiliar, even when, as was often the case, British law was more lenient. In the end a series of compromises was agreed. Courts



A Spitfire IX of No 331 (Norwegian) Sqn.

Marital would be convened with both national and RAF officers, and interpreters and national lawyers would be provided where needed. While serving with RAF units, or on stations commanded by an RAF officer, Allied personnel were subject to RAF law, but within national squadrons their own regulations were permitted.³³

In practice, the settling of legal questions often became a matter of trust; it was thought that the Free French, for example, were prone to political considerations in their legal proceedings, while, by the middle of 1943, the Dutch, Poles and Norwegians had all been given free reign to implement their own laws within their own squadrons.³⁴ Judging from the Norwegian response when this concession was granted in May 1943, RAF law evidently had something to be said for it. Nos 330 and 333 Sqns in Coastal Command, which were manned largely by ex-Royal Norwegian Naval Air Service personnel, were happy with this arrangement, whereas the two squadrons formed from ex-Royal Norwegian Army Air Service personnel serving in Fighter Command (Nos 331 and 332 Sqns) opted to retain the RAF system.³⁵

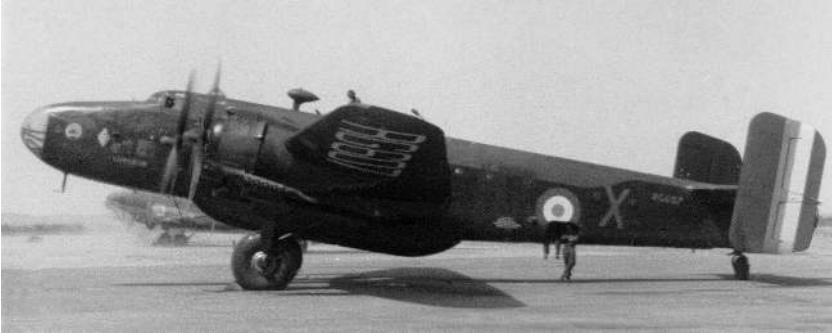
Equality.

The third principle, that of Equality, was particularly difficult to implement. With so many nations coming together, some of them with more than one air service, standardising rates of pay related to disparate rank structures created many problems, but these had to be solved in order to prevent jealousy and resentment.³⁶ With the proviso

that their English language skills were adequate, any Allied airman could be put through any training course or be posted to any role. Although there were certain restrictions early in the war that prevented Allied airmen from being posted to sensitive appointments, eg those associated with the use of radar, these were soon lifted, and foreign personnel were eventually employed on all manner of special work, including research and development.³⁷ Furthermore, the field was open for the best to rise to the top. For example, in 1943, while the argument was raging over aircraft for the Congo, there were two Belgian squadrons serving on the front line with Fighter Command, and five RAF squadrons were actually being commanded by Belgian officers.³⁸

Concentration.

The fourth principle was Concentration. The Air Ministry undertook to form national squadrons as soon as sufficient personnel were available – both aircrew and, ideally, ground crews.³⁹ This caused a number of problems, with some contingents trying to force the pace of the formation of national units, or providing clearly inadequate personnel. Probably the Air Ministry's worst experience was the formation of No 340 Sqn from Free French personnel. After more than a year of lobbying, the squadron was formed in Scotland in late 1941. The French had initially tried to have RAF ground crews assigned, but they eventually brought in their own men. Unfortunately, they were a mixture of French Air Force and French Naval Air Service personnel, who did not get on. Apart from political disagreements, which were, perhaps, inherent to French units,⁴⁰ the naval personnel received better pay than their air force colleagues. To cap it all, some of the men transferred in were Tahitians, who found the Scottish winter uncomfortable, to say the least. The squadron would be a thorn in the RAF's side for the next twelve months until they finally acceded to the French pleas and drafted in British ground crews.⁴¹ The French ground crews were then sent to the Middle East, where further problems were on-going relating to who should control Free French units when serving in their own colonies in North Africa.⁴² The Air Ministry had managed to stifle this issue to a large extent, but national governments still felt they should have a greater say in how their national squadrons were run. Again De Gaulle was



A Halifax VI, previously of No 346 (French) Sqn, serving with GB2/21 Guyenne of the reconstituted post-war Armée de l'Air.

perhaps the worst offender, sometimes promoting or demoting Free French personnel without informing, letting alone asking, the Air Ministry first.⁴³

Construction.

Nevertheless, despite the problems that they created, the national units certainly served their purpose. Apart from their operational contribution, they also served a useful propaganda role. They had a long term value, too, feeding into the fifth principle, that of Construction. The Air Ministry undertook to work towards creating independent, self-contained national air forces that could be established in their native countries when liberation came. By March 1944, the Air Ministry was already receiving a growing number of requests in this context. These had to be handled with some care, however, in order to avoid an undesirable diversion of time, effort and resources. It was a matter of priorities; while the creation of new air forces was definitely a long-term goal, it could not be allowed to interfere with the immediate aim of winning the war.⁴⁴

There were other long-term considerations here, too. With their heritage, it was likely that the newly independent post-war Allied air forces would, in the short term at least, operate British aircraft and equipment. This would guarantee foreign markets for British industry, to the annoyance of the United States, which was looking to exploit these markets themselves and saw the British involvement as unfair competition. It became a delicate task to balance the temptations of

new European markets with the demands of their American creditors.⁴⁵

Concerns over security imposed further constraints on the Principle of Construction. Just as in the early months of the war, when foreigners had not been trusted to work in certain areas, in 1945 they were once again quietly screened from sensitive appointments. Personnel working in headquarters buildings, on research and development, and on anything relating to air defence systems, were discreetly reassigned to restrict their up-to-date knowledge of the UK's defence capabilities. With Europe's post-war political map still uncertain, it was deemed best to limit who could access such information.⁴⁶

Training was also restricted in 1945, although this was mainly due to the proposed reductions in RAF facilities as demobilisation began. However, the training of Allied instructors and specialists was stepped up to help to prepare them for independence.⁴⁷

Although far from easy at many times, the relationships between the RAF and the Allied air forces were for the most part successful. National pride created many bones of contention, but we have, for the most part, been considering affairs at the level of the Air Ministry and national governments. Many of these bodies had their eyes on higher issues – national prestige or the long-term futures of their respective air forces. Their attitudes could sometimes be coloured by the need to shake off defeat or to overcompensate for their exiled status, and sometimes by empire building or petty politics. But none of this should be allowed to overshadow the genuine and valuable contribution that the Allied Air Forces made at the operational level.

Obviously, problems also occurred at squadron level. Highly politicised groups, such as the French, suffered from tension between factions, especially after the fall of Vichy North Africa. The Vichy Air Force had put up an impressive resistance to the Allies in Syria, Madagascar and during Operation TORCH, and many of the French pilots subsequently drafted into a reconstituted *Armée de l'Air* had victories to their credit against RAF aircraft. Many of the Free French were loathe to serve with ex-Vichy personnel, and vice versa. Several ex-Vichy pilots would fly back to southern France as soon as the opportunity presented itself, and many more decided that, if they were

to fight for the Allies, they would rather do it in the Soviet Union, flying with the *Normandie* Regiment.

For the most part, however, at the operational level the partnerships worked. To return to the Belgians as an example, their Government in exile may have caused unnecessary problems with their demands for aeroplanes and personnel for use in the Congo, but in Europe 1,500 Belgian personnel served with the RAF. Out of 600 aircrew, some 200 would lose their lives on operations, and Belgians would claim 301 enemy aircraft and flying bombs as destroyed or damaged. In all thirteen Belgian officers would command RAF squadrons in combat.⁴⁸

For the most part, relations were professional and productive between British and non-British personnel, although each took some time to get used to the other. Differing institutional cultures were as much of a problem as language, and Free French pilot Jacques Souviat found the RAF difficult to understand at first, recording:

‘In the enormous organisation that was the RAF, many things seemed illogical and shocked our French backgrounds. Each time we received the same explanation, “Yes, but it works!” and it was true. Everything was based on pragmatism and the confidence reciprocated in general, called the ‘team spirit.’⁴⁹

Genuine respect and co-operation was fostered across the RAF, based on inclusive and professional attitudes, pulling these diverse forces together into a highly effective fighting force. Perhaps the close co-operation and integration is the true moral of the case of the Norwegian aircrew at Tempsford, where no one had particularly noticed the foreign personnel because they were so much part of the accepted fabric of the Service.

Many of the Allies found leaving the RAF harder than they had imagined. Even the staunch De Gaullist Pierre Clostermann felt sadness at leaving the RAF in 1945 to return to France, and we can perhaps end in no better way than in Clostermann’s words as he records in *The Big Show*, how, on leaving,

‘My pride welled up within me then I thought of you my aircraft, and above all of you, my dear RAF friends, whom I had had the privilege of knowing and living amongst, with your uniforms the colour of your island mists.’⁵⁰



Free French personnel on parade at the Franco-Belgian Air Training School at Odiham, January 1941.

Notes:

¹ France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Greece, Yugoslavia, and (depending on your definition of Europe), Turkey. Volunteers also came from neutral Switzerland, Sweden and Eire as did a number of refugees who had previously fled from Austria and Germany.

² Brown, A; *Airmen in Exile* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2000) p182.

³ See TNA AIR2/5663: 'Proposed Directorate to deal with the organisation and administration of the Allied air personnel in the country'.

⁴ TNA AIR2/5663 Enclosure 14c.

⁵ Brown *op cit*, pp7-11.

⁶ See TNA AIR2/5663 *passim*.

⁷ TNA FO371/34372 Enclosure 64.

⁸ TNA FO371/34372 Enclosure 67.

⁹ TNA FO371/24372 *passim*.

¹⁰ Berthon, S; *Allies at War* (Harper Collins, London, 2001) pp 35-39.

¹¹ Apart from anything else, while De Gaulle had briefly been Under Secretary of State for National Defence, and a brevet general, he was technically now only a colonel with no political or diplomatic standing. He did, however, have determination, strength of character, and a strong sense of destiny.

¹² TNA FO371/24372.

¹³ TNA FO371/24372 Enclosure 390.

- ¹⁴ For example, see Brown, p193.
- ¹⁵ Brown *op cit*, p185.
- ¹⁶ TNA AIR2/5663 Enclosure 115a.
- ¹⁷ TNA AIR2/5663 Enclosure 214a.
- ¹⁸ Terraine, J; *The Right of the Line* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1985) p301.
- ¹⁹ TNA AIR2/5663 Enclosure 214a.
- ²⁰ TNA AIR2/8160 Enclosure 5e.
- ²¹ TNA AIR2/8160 Enclosure 5c.
- ²² Brown *op cit*, pp 169-170.
- ²³ Brown *op cit*, p15.
- ²⁴ TNA AIR8/778: Belgian Air Force: reorganisation in RAFVR, June-August 1943.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.* Later established to be: 180 pilots, 20 observers, 10 wireless operators and 40 ground crews.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ TNA AIR2/8238 Enclosure 24a: Report on the Allied Air Forces for the period from 21 September 1943-20 December 1943.
- ³⁰ Brown *op cit*, p12.
- ³¹ For example, see TNA AIR2/5144 Enclosure 4b.
- ³² Air Council Minutes, AC (18)43, 26 February, 1943.
- ³³ TNA AIR2/4806 *passim*.
- ³⁴ TNA AIR2/4806 Enclosure 76a.
- ³⁵ TNA AIR2/4806 Enclosure 88a.
- ³⁶ For example, see TNA AIR2/4806 *passim*.
- ³⁷ TNA AIR2/8160 Enclosure 33a.
- ³⁸ Brown *op cit*, p191.
- ³⁹ For example, see TNA AIR2/5144 Enclosure 4b.
- ⁴⁰ Brown *op cit*, p 142 & p151.
- ⁴¹ Brown *op cit*, pp145-154.
- ⁴² TNA AIR2/8160 Enclosure 2c.
- ⁴³ Brown *op cit*, p152.
- ⁴⁴ TNA AIR2/8160 Enclosure 14a.
- ⁴⁵ Brown *op cit*, pp158-159, for example.
- ⁴⁶ TNA AIR2/8160 Enclosure 33a.
- ⁴⁷ TNA AIR2/8160 Enclosure 30a: 'Notes of a Meeting held in DAFL's Room, Seaford House on 15 June 1945 to discuss Technical Training Facilities for Allied and Other Friendly Non-British Air Forces in Stage II'.
- ⁴⁸ Rens, Col G; 'Honour and Gallantry' in Garnett, G C; *Against All Odds* (Michael Finch, London, 1990).
- ⁴⁹ McKinstry, L; *Spitfire: Portrait of a Legend* (John Murray, London, 2007) p340.
- ⁵⁰ Clostermann, P; *The Big Show* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1951) p255.

MORNING Q & A

Wg Cdr Jeff Jefford. There was an initial flood of Poles and Czechs into the UK following the fall of France in 1940 but we kept a Polish ITW running for the whole of the war, and there would have been a need to find a constant stream of replacements for casualties and to man additional squadrons as they formed. Where did the second wave come from? Were they simply poached from the Polish Army?

Peter Devitt. They came out of the Gulags. Following BARBAROSSA in 1941 substantial numbers of Polish personnel, not all by any means, were released and they found their way to General Anders II Corps in the Middle East and from there into the air force. Any women who served in the Polish Air Force, or Army, had more than likely come from a Soviet prison camp.

Sqn Ldr Colin Richardson. We have heard something of the formation of the air forces of Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand but India has not been mentioned. I believe that the Indian Air Force was formed before WW II and that it fought in Burma, presumably with Indian pilots. Can anyone expand on that?

Sebastian Cox. The Indian Air Force was formed before WW II, but it did not become the *Royal* Indian Air Force until 1945 (**Anon** – at the specific behest of King George VI in recognition of its achievements). As with all of the Commonwealth air forces, it was a fairly small scale affair to begin with but, although run by RAF officers, there were Indian pilots, and groundcrew, from the outset and several independent squadrons were formed, and became operational, during the war, several of them going on to form the basis of the post-war Indian and Pakistani Air Forces. Where the Indian Air Force differed from the other Commonwealth air forces is that India lacked the independent status of a Dominion, so, while there was an Indian Air Force, answering, like the Indian Army, to a nominally Indian Government, that Indian Government was ultimately a British institution – which was not the case with, for instance, Australia.

Devitt. I would just add there was an element of ‘colonial’ policy at play here. As with the Indian Army, which, following the Mutiny of 1857, was not provided with its own artillery or sappers, the air force was deliberately constrained in size and operational capability. In

short, the administration was reluctant to create an air arm that could be used against its colonial masters. Nevertheless, by the end of the war it had a strength in excess of 25,000 personnel supporting nine squadrons which had fought very well, mostly in Burma, although individual Indian aircrew could be found elsewhere serving with the RAF – one notable example is Plt Off Shailendra Eknath Sukthanker DFC, a bomb aimer who flew fourteen sorties in the RAF Museum's Lancaster, R5868, while with No 83 Sqn.

Mike Meech. What was the highest wartime rank attained by a European refugee? – or were they perhaps not permitted to attain high ranks?

Cox. Good question – which I don't think I can answer without notice. I can tell you that Alec Maisner, who joined the RAF during the war, eventually retired in the 1970s as an air-vice marshal. But I don't recall anyone higher than a group captain during the war, although I would be happy to stand corrected if anyone knows better.

Stephen Mason. Mention was made of Vichy French forces joining the Allies. Did that create any issues with the Free French, or any of the other Europeans?

Stuart Hadaway. Yes it did. There was a lot of friction between the Free French and Vichy forces post Operation TORCH and the French Naval Air Service used it to make another attempt to break away to become a separate service.

Devitt. Interestingly, at least one of the ex-Vichy French flyers had an Iron Cross, having flown with the *Luftwaffe* on the Eastern Front.

Gp Capt Ian Madelin. There is an aspect of the international scene which is not on our programme. I am referring to the United States. The fact is that, while one is going about one's every day business, one may well exert an influence on somebody else and, unless you deliberately set out to do so, you may not even be aware of the impact that you are having. The RAF certainly did not set out to influence the Americans but, influence them we did. I have recently discussed this with a retired USAF major-general who is now in his 90s. He witnessed this process, and cited a number of specific instances, but he summed it up by saying that the Royal Air Force had provided a 'road

map' and, once you have a map, you know that if you follow it you will eventually reach your destination. The destination, in this case, was the creation of an independent USAF, which eventually happened in 1947, but one wonders whether they would have made it without the RAF's example. To make the point, I would like to quote from the proceedings of an Anglo-American seminar held in this theatre in 1990.¹ Maj-Gen Ramsay Potts ended his contribution by saying:

'I would like to make a final comment and it is about the way that the USAAF viewed the RAF as a model. All the senior commanders that I was associated with had an admiring envy of the RAF. They were separate from the army; they had distinctive ranks and they had a separate and independent Air Force that had equal status with the army and the navy. Our men all wanted that, and they wanted it more than anything.

I recall an incident in Japan when I was working for General Anderson as his Executive Officer. We had a dinner for him and Seversky, the famous aircraft designer, who got up to propose a toast to "Air Chief Marshal" Orville Anderson², and General Anderson broke down and wept. He was so absolutely overcome. More than anything in the world that is what he wanted and that is also what the senior officers in the Air Force wanted. They wanted a separate Air Force, and they wanted one like the RAF. And that, in September 1947, is eventually what we got.'

AVM George Black. Having spent many years working with the USAF in one capacity or another, I would concur with everything that you said Ian. The Americans are our closest ally and we do work with them both easily and well, even though we have not always seen eye to eye. In the later Cold War years, for instance, the USAF planned to penetrate into Eastern Europe at high level whereas the RAF was determined to go at low level. We simply agreed to differ on that one, but it didn't spoil the working relationship between the air forces and I had the highest admiration for the level of co-operation that was achieved.

AVM Alan Johnson. Reference was made to the language difficulties encountered by and with the Poles and Czechs. When the

RAF Sport Parachuting Association was formed in 1960 the pilot of our venerable Rapide was a Czech who had escaped and come to England in 1940. A competent pilot, with combat experience, he joined the RAF but his English was very poor so, rather than enlisting him as a pilot, they made him a signaller – a communicator!

Gp Capt Jock Heron. With respect to foreigners serving with the RAF, what happened with Air Publications and the like? Were APs translated into foreign languages, or were they interpreted by cadres of linguists working at the coal face?

Hadaway. It was a bit of both. The intention was certainly that personnel should be trained to have a grasp of English sufficient to do the job – whatever that job was. Some manuals were translated into foreign languages, chiefly those intended for aircrew.

Richard Bateson. In May 1939 Gp Capt John Slessor, then Director of Plans at the Air Ministry, was approached by the Foreign Office over the possibility of recruiting veteran Civil War pilots from among the 2,000 Spanish personal of all ranks being held in a French internment camp at Perpignan. Nothing came of this, one reason being that RAF commissions were only granted to men, both of whose parents were British nationals. By 1940 this hurdle had fallen, one example being Brig-Gen Lodomil Raysky. Until March 1939 the Inspector General of the Polish Air Force, he was rescued from an internment camp in Scotland at the height of the Battle of Britain by the CAS, Sir Cyril Newall, and given the rank of squadron leader. He ended the war as an air commodore having been decorated with the DSO and Bar and an AFC, making him a possible contender for the title of highest ranking wartime refugee.

Devitt. A comment on the Spanish Civil War airmen – both pilots and ground personnel. They were not a realistic option because they were almost exclusively communists and could have been expected to follow Moscow's party line which was, at the time, to undermine the Western war effort. The same was true within the Czech, and to some extent, the Polish contingents and the communists had to be combed out. Post-BARBAROSSA, their credibility was, at least to some extent, restored.

Air Cdre Bill Tyack. Perhaps I could offer an observation on the

motivation of the Slavs. In 1984 I was invited to a Battle of Britain celebration at Alconbury. There were a couple of Polish veterans of the battle present, effectively as guests of honour. The initial formality having relaxed somewhat, as tends to happen at events being hosted, or lubricated, by Phantom crews, I was eventually cornered by these two old Polish pilots. I was wearing uniform, of course, and, with tears in his eyes, one of them said, ‘Young man, what are you doing to set my country free?’ I was doing quite a bit actually, but all that I was able to do was mumble a few words about the Cold War. It didn’t seem to me, in 1984, remotely possible that Poland would ever be free and I was impressed by the faith that these men had and that had endured for so long. Five years later, of course, it happened, and I just hope that they had lived to see it. But what I wanted to get across was the devotion and commitment involved and the fact that they had kept it going for so long.

Devitt. The Polish national identity is felt so strongly that it has the intensity of a virtual religion. The reason being that that their freedom has been taken from them so often. As a result they will ‘export’ their principles, and their nationality, and fight for them under other flags. They will fight for the French, or for the Americans, or for the British – ‘for your freedom and for ours’. When the Warsaw Pact collapsed, more or less over a weekend, it took them by surprise as much as anyone else. They were suddenly free, but they were ready for that. One of the characteristics of Poles is that, until recently at least, they did not set much store by material things – because they can be taken from you. They carried their nationality in their minds and in their hearts and they taught their children to believe that wherever they stood, they were Poles.

Cox. This sort of thing goes back to the Seventeenth Century, or probably even earlier – Napoleon certainly used Polish troops. The Polish psyche is indeed an interesting phenomenon.

As to Czechs – I attended a conference in Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s, shortly after the Wall came down. They had yet to adjust to a more relaxed way of doing things and some Communist-style practices still remained, as I was to find out. An honour guard had been posted in the conference hall to protect the flags that were on display. I was at the lectern, half way through delivering my paper

when, without any warning, the doors crashed open. The relief guard goose-stepped in and with much stamping of feet the changing of the guard ritual was enacted. The old guard stomped out and the doors slammed shut. I was somewhat nonplussed by this unexpected intrusion but no one else seemed to be in the slightest bit perturbed, regarding it as quite normal behaviour!

An interesting thing that I learned was that ex-RAF veterans had been granted pensions in 1990-91. Some of them were present on this occasion, some wearing old RAF uniforms, some in Czech Air Force uniform. Also present were veterans who had flown with the Soviet Air Force during the war; these men had had pensions throughout the post-war era. Furthermore, since the ex-RAF men had been regarded as being politically unreliable, they had been denied party membership, which was a considerable handicap under a communist regime, and they were discriminated against in that they were permitted to hold only low-grade or menial jobs – as storekeepers, janitors and the like. There was, therefore, an understandable degree of bitterness between the two factions – and this became increasingly evident as the evenings wore on during social gatherings.

Wg Cdr John Stubbington. Perhaps I could say a few words in my capacity as the Chairman of the 100 Gp Association. Among our number we have several East Europeans who did an excellent job during the war by exercising their linguistic skills while flying as special operators. Apart from taking the risks common to all aircrew, they faced an additional hazard in that, if they were unfortunate enough to be shot down, they tended to be afforded less hospitality than their British colleagues.

Frank Angus. I served during the Battle of Britain and I recall that the public were aware of the British air aces, but we knew nothing of the Poles and Czechs. Was this because the media could neither spell nor pronounce their names?

Devitt. No. It was policy. The press had strict instructions not to release the names of any of the airmen in exile for fear that their families would be subject to retribution. You may have noticed that, in order to hide his identity, the posed photograph that I displayed, of a Polish pilot in the cockpit of a Spitfire, showed him wearing an

oxygen mask.

Another example is that in the first book to deal with Poles in the RAF, *Squadron 303*, which is about to be republished incidentally, no one is identified by name. They all have nicknames – ‘Ox’, for instance, is Feric and Zumbach is ‘Donald’ – he was known as Donald Duck. And the Germans certainly did target their families; there was no publicity given to the award of their DFCs, for instance.

Roger Annett. What about Finland? They had a pretty tortuous war. Did any Finns find their way into an allied air force?

Devitt. Not so far as I am aware, although we nearly found ourselves fighting alongside the Finns with the French, and the Poles, against the Soviets – while simultaneously fighting the Germans – which would have been quite an achievement! I think that Finland was technically on the side of the Axis, certainly during the ‘Continuation War’ against the Soviets but in 1944 they are obliged to switch sides and fight the Germans, but, from the British point of view, Finland was seen as a separate issue and England was a long way to come for a Finn. That said, there was at least one Lithuanian in the RAF; he was one of the fifty executed following the Great Escape, and I have just been reading about two Mexicans and an Icelander as well, so there were some wildcards who found their way here, perhaps because one of their parents was British.

Cox. While Finland had fought the Soviet Union single-handed, and with surprising success, in 1939-40, it was more or less obliged to ally itself with Germany in 1941 because, following Hitler’s attack on Russia, they shared a common enemy. Since that enemy was the Soviet Union, which was allied to Great Britain, it would have made no sense for Finns to have sought to enlist in the RAF to fight for the ‘wrong side’.

Jefford. I think that the point is that, while Finland was obliged to cede some territory to Russia in 1940, the country was never actually overrun, so there was no need for Finns to emigrate to fight their wars; they could stay at home and do it.

¹ RAF Historical Society Journal No 9, p42.

² General Anderson’s given name was Orvil, rather than Orville. **Ed**

INTERNATIONAL FLYING TRAINING

Wg Cdr Jeff Jefford



'Jeff' joined the RAF in 1959 as a pilot but (was) soon remustered as a navigator. His flying experience included tours with Nos 45, 83 and 50 Sqns and instructing at No 6 FTS. Administrative and staff appointments involved sundry jobs at Manby, Gatow, Brampton and a total of eight years at HQ Strike Command. He took early retirement in 1991 to read history at London University. He has three books to his credit and has been a member of the Society's Executive Committee since 1998; he is currently editor of its Journal.

Along with the rest of our Service, the RAF's current training system is a mere shadow of what it once was and, while it is now the smallest that it has been since the early 1920s, it has also been increasingly civilianised, and you may have some views on that. But it is not for this Society to debate the pros and cons of the RAF's current and future arrangements; our business is to wallow in its glory days. So, in the specific context of today's seminar, what were the international dimensions of RAF training? As will become apparent, it rather depends upon when you ask the question – and how much you want to know. As is often the case with a presentation of this nature, one is faced with the options of an overall survey, which will, inevitably, lack depth, or focusing on one aspect and digging deep at the expense of the big picture. I am going for broad and shallow, starting with WW I.

Our first essay in overseas training began in July 1916 – in Egypt. Initially provided with drafts of trainees from home, the expansion of the UK-based system during 1917 made it less necessary to sustain the time-consuming practice of shipping people to and from the Middle East, so the schools in Egypt began to draw the bulk of their intake increasingly from local internal recruiting and from South Africa, much of their output being absorbed by the growing number of in-theatre squadrons. Hard statistics are a little hard to come by and those that are available are difficult to interpret but it is safe to say that the



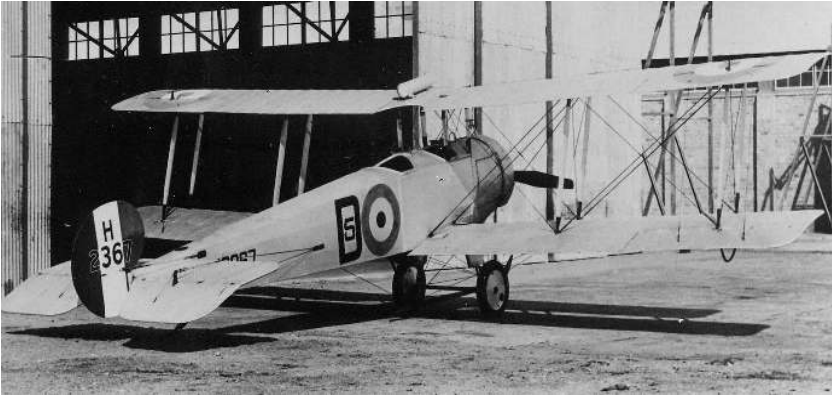
Curtiss 'Jennies' of No 87 CTS at Benbrook TX – winter 1917-18.

wartime output of the Egyptian system would have amounted to something like 1,500 trained pilots.¹

Meanwhile, substantial numbers of Canadians had been joining the RFC, most of them drawn from the trenches in France. A March 1916 decision, to increase squadron establishments from twelve to eighteen aeroplanes, meant a 50% increase in the demand for pilots overnight followed, in June, by an edict that would virtually double the size of the RFC to fifty-six squadrons. This rate of expansion made it worth setting up a dedicated training system in Canada and this began to operate in February 1917.

Orders were placed for the American Curtiss JN-4, the 'Jenny', to be built in Canada and seven aerodromes were constructed, mostly along the north shore of Lake Ontario. RFC (Canada) eventually had sixteen training squadrons organised into three wings.

Under a reciprocal arrangement, which saw some 400 American cadets (and 2,000 mechanics) being trained by the RFC, two of the wings spent the winter of 1917-18 near Fort Worth to take advantage of the weather factor. They might have been better off in Florida, because the day after the RFC arrived at Benbrook it was under three inches of snow, although, being in Texas, this did not last, of course. The third wing stayed behind to develop winter flying techniques, which it did, quite successfully and, had the war gone on, the RAF had



An Avro 504K of the inter-war No 4 FTS at Abu Sueir.

intended to spend the winter of 1918-19 in Canada.

By the time of the Armistice RFC/RAF (Canada) had enlisted 9,200 flight cadets, 3,135 of whom completed their training as pilots, 2,539 of those subsequently being sent overseas. Observer training did not begin until later, the first cohort graduating in July 1918, but 137 observers had also qualified and 85 of them had been sent to France.²

So how did all this overseas activity stack up against the global picture? One has to grope about a bit but some idea can be gained from the Air Force List for January 1919 which names 15,817 pilots (ranked as lieutenant-colonels or below) and 5,513 commissioned aircrew other than pilots (observers and kite balloon officers), to which we must add more than 5,500 who had died³ – something like 26,500 in all. Of these perhaps 1,500 had been trained in Egypt and 3,300 in Canada. So the overseas schools had contributed a shade under 20% to the overall total.

Between the wars, to supplement the much reduced home-based facilities, and to take advantage of the better weather factor, the RAF retained a school in Egypt, No 4 FTS at Abu Sueir, which turned out about 80 pilots per year until 1936 when its output was roughly doubled. With war becoming increasingly likely, however, it was clear that the existing arrangements would not suffice and the training staffs had begun to talk about setting up additional schools overseas, certainly in France and possibly by re-instating the WW I organisation in Canada.

Events reversed these priorities, although some progress had been made with planning. Indeed, by 1940 numerical identities had been assigned to the five FTSS that were to be set up in France, and locations had been identified for four of them, but the French collapse in June put paid to that scheme before it got off the ground. But this setback was more than offset by the success of the Canadian enterprise, which was mirrored on a smaller scale by broadly similar arrangements in South Africa and Rhodesia, supplemented by a variety of facilities provided by the United States.

In October 1939 a British delegation, led by Lord Riverdale, set off for Ottawa.⁴ There it was to meet Canadian, Australian and New Zealand representatives with a view to setting up a joint system to train British and Dominion aircrew. The subsequent negotiations were not without their complications. The training scheme which had operated in Canada during WW I had been a British-run affair and, since Riverdale believed that ‘it was beyond the RCAF’s capabilities to “organise and control a training scheme of this magnitude”’, it was envisaged that any similar arrangement would also have to be supervised by the RAF.⁵ Despite Britain’s wish to control affairs, however, it was expected that the other participating governments would underwrite a substantial proportion of the cost. This high-handed imperialist attitude failed to take sufficient account of ‘colonial’ sensitivities – the point being, of course, that Dominions were *not* colonies, and the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, took particular umbrage at this.

Since Canada (unlike Australia) had not formed an air force of its own during WW I, all Canadian airmen (and all New Zealanders and many Australians) had been obliged to serve in British uniform. As a result, King felt that Canada’s, very substantial, contribution to the first war in the air had been largely overlooked and that her sovereignty had in some way been impugned. This still smarted and he was determined to ensure that this should not happen again. Australia and New Zealand were in full sympathy with Canada over the question of national recognition. Furthermore, while the RAAF and RNZAF were content to take advantage of the potential offered by the proposed joint scheme in Canada, they fully intended to sustain and expand their domestic training organisations at the same time.

After lengthy discussion, the Riverdale Agreement was eventually

signed on 17 December. The British had been obliged to suppress their reservations over the perceived limitations of the Canadians and had agreed to control over all training activities in Canada being exercised by the RCAF. For its part, Canada's residual mistrust of British ambitions was overcome by the admirable expedient of seconding Air Cdre Robert Leckie, a Canadian serving in the RAF, to Ottawa where he was given a seat on the Canadian Air Council whence he was able to direct operations.⁶ What is interesting, however, is the loose nomenclature associated with these arrangements. For instance, when the Riverdale Mission returned to the UK, its formal report to the British Government used the term 'Dominion Air Training Scheme'. This typewritten report covered a copy of the formal printed Agreement which does not – referring only to the (lower case) 'co-operative air training scheme'. In fact, while the 19-page 'Agreement' goes on to discuss the specific obligations accepted by each of the four participating governments, it very diplomatically⁷ avoids assigning any form of title to these arrangements.⁷

A month later, in January 1940, a Standing Committee of the Air Council was established in order to monitor developments. To be chaired by the Under-Secretary of State for Air, Harold Balfour, it was to be known as the *Empire* Air Training Scheme Committee. Its terms of reference began as follows: 'To keep in touch with developments of the *Dominion* Air Training Scheme . .' (author's italics).⁸ Despite the evident uncertainty as to the precise terminology to be used, the existence of this committee ensured that the 'EATS' label soon became firmly affixed within RAF circles.

That this was not the case elsewhere is evident from the fact that correspondence raised by the RCAF, and by diplomatic offices on both sides of the Atlantic, throughout 1940-41, used a variety of terms to refer to the activities in Canada. A trawl through the related files at Kew reveals such variations on a theme as: the Joint Air Training Plan; the Air Training Scheme Agreement; the Dominion Air Training Scheme; the Commonwealth Air Training Plan; the British Commonwealth Air Training Agreement; the British Commonwealth Joint Air Training Plan and so on.⁹ The one word that does not appear is 'Empire' and, reading between these lines, it seems that everyone was so conscious of the unfortunate connotations of the imperial tag



An RCAF Fairchild Cornell, representative of the BCATP.

and were at such pains to avoid using it that they could not even acknowledge that they were doing so. As a result it appears to have been too embarrassing even to raise the question of a formal title and it is a little surprising to find that such a large-scale, international enterprise seems to have operated until 1942 without the benefit of a universally acknowledged name.

It should be understood that, initially at least, what the RAF meant by the EATS embraced only the arrangements covered by the Riverdale Agreement, that is to say the training of RAF, RAAF, RCAF and RNZAF personnel in Canada. This informal 'definition' soon expanded, however, to include the training, under domestic arrangements in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, of additional RAAF and RNZAF air crew for service with the RAF and later developments within the evolving Canadian system. For example, in the summer of 1940 it was agreed that, apart from the schools being run by (or on behalf of¹⁰) the RCAF, the RAF would also be permitted to establish and operate its own training organisation on Canadian soil.

Although some of the schools involved in this 'lodger' arrangement would actually be formed in Canada, the basis of the organisation was created by moving a number of units, the so-called 'transferred schools', from the UK.¹¹ While these nominally British



A Master II of No 25 Air School, Sanderton – a unit of the JATS.

units were not, strictly speaking, embraced by the terms of the Riverdale Agreement, they were obviously heavily reliant upon Canadian goodwill and infrastructure. Exploiting their ‘visiting forces’ status, they soon became *de facto* elements of the Canadian-run organisation in that they were subject to the administrative and operational control of one of the four regional RCAF Training Commands whose AOCs could alter their training programmes, post personnel between units and so on.¹²

Although the Canadian enterprise was far and away the largest, the British developed other joint overseas training facilities, notably under bilateral arrangements with Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. In addition, while they were chiefly concerned with IAF personnel, some of the capacity of training schools set up in India was also used to train RAF aircrew while others, notably significant numbers of air gunners, were trained in the Middle East.

The concept of the Rhodesian Air Training Group (RATG) was broadly similar to that of the Canadian undertaking, which it actually pre-dated, in that it provided both for the training of British aircrew and for the supply of Rhodesian personnel to fly in the RAF. The South African arrangement was somewhat different because, although (after a hasty change of leadership) its government had declared war on Germany in September 1939, Pretoria was not prepared to participate actively until the Union itself was directly threatened.¹³ In anticipation of that event, however, the South Africans recognised that

they would need to build up their own armed forces and while so doing they were content to assist with the training of British personnel. As with the Canadian case, the negotiations were protracted but the so-called 'Van-Brookham' Agreement was eventually signed on 1 June 1940.¹⁴ As originally drafted this involved RAF training units, some, as in Canada, transferred lock stock and barrel from the UK,¹⁵ operating independently of SAAF schools. In practice, the two organisations were progressively integrated and a year later these combined arrangements were formally endorsed when the original memorandum was replaced by the Joint Air Training Scheme – the JATS.

The original Riverdale Agreement would expire in March 1943 so a major international Training Conference was convened in Ottawa in May 1942 in order to co-ordinate the continued training of Allied aircrew and to extend the Agreement for a further two years, to March 1945. At this conference, the British agreed to relinquish control of the RAF-run training units in Canada to the RCAF. This organisational change was significant enough to warrant changing the name of the whole Canadian enterprise or, to be more accurate, seemingly agreeing to give it a mutually acceptable name for the first time. Thereafter it was officially known as the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

Strictly speaking, therefore, it was now appropriate to refer to the arrangements with the various Dominions as the BCATP, the JATS and the RATG.¹⁶ Because they alone were involved in all three of these activities, and had an interest in the output of various national schemes, from their strictly Anglocentric perspective, the British needed an umbrella term to embrace all of these arrangements and by 1942 it was generally understood (in London, at least) that the 'EATS' meant virtually all training being conducted 'overseas' on behalf of the RAF. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that, although it was not formally introduced until 1942, most Canadian writers tend to describe all wartime training activities in Canada as having been conducted under the BCATP from the outset¹⁷ while their British counterparts still tend to use the EATS label somewhat indiscriminately. This is not the place to explore the complexity of this global organisation, suffice to say that at one time or another well over 300 separate schools would participate in this vast undertaking.

	Canada	Australia	New Zealand	South Africa	Southern Rhodesia
Tiger Moth	–	740	100	–	–
Anson	1,530	1,030	25	750	80
Battle	750	360	0	190	25
Oxford	745	390	625	400	45
Totals	3,025	2,520	750	1,340	150

Grand Total 7,785

Fig 1. Approximate numbers of representative types exported by the UK in connection with co-operative training arrangement.

While the host nations provided the infrastructure and the bulk of the ground staff and, at least, the initial cohort of instructors many of the aircraft were provided, or paid for, by the British, including Battles, Tiger Moths, Oxfords and Ansons. The table at Figure 1 gives some idea of the scale of this contribution, approaching 8,000 British-built aeroplanes – of these four types alone. There were many others; the 400 Masters that were sent to South Africa, for instance, along with substantial quantities of Harvards, many of which were also supplied to Rhodesia. Apart from these imports, the Canadians built, among many other aeroplanes, more than 1,500 Tiger Moths and nearly twice as many Ansons. Australia and New Zealand both built training aeroplanes too.

The reason for the British exporting many of the Harvards that it had previously imported, was that they were no longer required in the UK. Carrying out *ab initio* flying training in increasingly crowded airspace (with a rapidly expanding USAAF presence compounding the problem), especially at night, in a blacked-out operational theatre stiff with anti-aircraft guns and with skies filled with barrage balloons and trigger happy night fighter pilots had always been difficult. Once the overseas facilities were well-established, it became possible to run-down the home-based system and by 1942 the UK had virtually withdrawn from the basic flying training game altogether. From then on, all that happened at home was that, before being sent to Canada or Africa, potential aircrew were 'graded' – given 10 or 12 hours in a Tiger Moth to determine whether they had sufficient aptitude to make them a reasonable prospect as a pilot or whether they would be better

off in some other aircrew category.

As a result, as indicated in Figure 2, the output of domestically trained pilots rose steadily for the first two years of the war and then rapidly tailed off, virtually to nothing, while, in Canada, output eventually began to exceed demand and the brakes had to be applied in 1943.

Figure 3 shows that the training of observers and navigators reflected a similar pattern, although Jurby stayed in business for the duration, continuing to turn out about 500 per year, partly to provide a comparative yardstick but again, in terms of quantity, the UK's direct contribution was dwarfed by that of Canada.

It was rather different with wireless operators, gunners and flight engineers – Figure 4. Their courses were relatively short so it was not an economic proposition to send them abroad. Most British cadets in these categories were, therefore, trained in the UK, so the pattern was rather different, and the Canadian output did not overtake that of the UK until 1945, rather than 1941, and even then the differential was much smaller, largely because St Athan was almost the exclusive source of flight engineers for all Commonwealth air forces for the duration.

What all of this amounted to is summarised at Figure 5. There is nothing new here; these are the official figures that were compiled by AHB and eventually published in 1952. Subsequent researchers have attempted to refine these numbers but any corrections that have been offered have been marginal at best. It is, perhaps, worth making one point – you will often find the Canadian total quoted as 131,553 rather than 137,910 shown in Figure 5. The difference arises because the British figures include output to the end of the Japanese war, whereas the Canadians drew the line when the BCATP ended in March 1945 and they also discount pilots trained in Canada prior to the implementation of the Riverdale Agreement and all aircrew produced by the RAF-run schools before they were taken over by the RCAF in 1942.¹⁸ But a discrepancy of a few thousand is more or less lost in the noise created by the global output of Commonwealth aircrew which was almost a third of a million.

Before leaving WW II, we need to consider the substantial assistance offered by the USA. In May 1940 the USAAC announced that it was increasing its output of trained pilots to 7,000 per year,

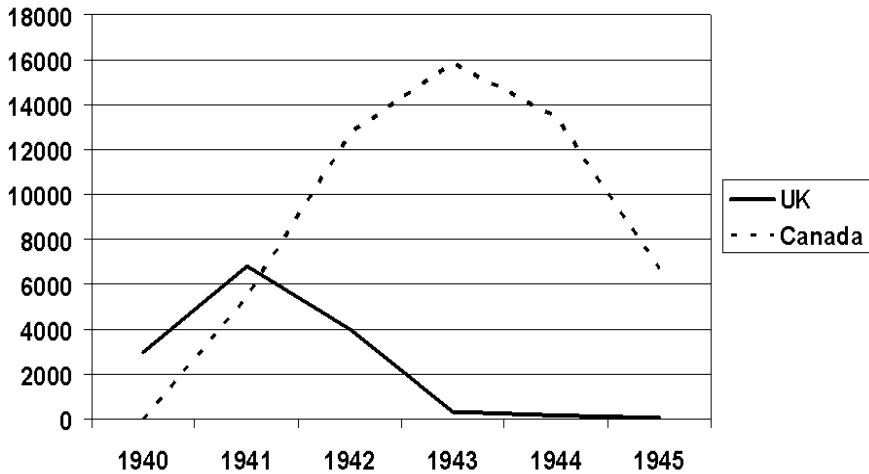


Fig 2. Annual Pilot Output from the UK and Canada

Source: AP3233 – RAF Flying Training, Vol 1

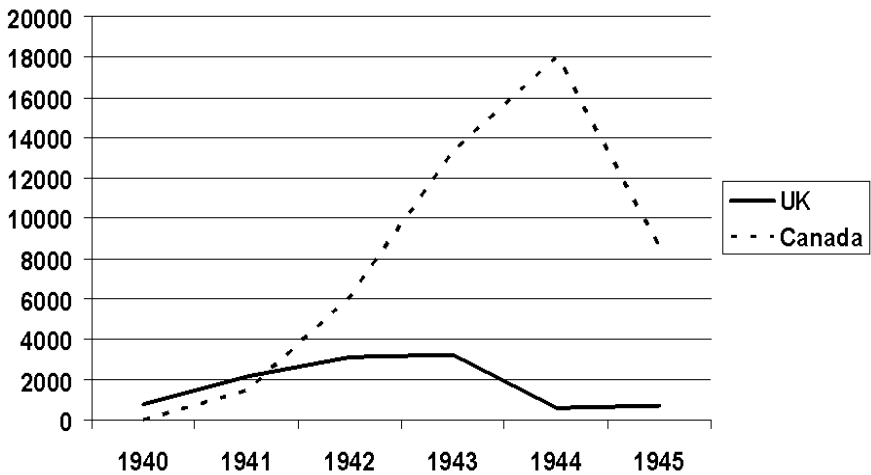


Fig 3. Annual Observer & Navigator/Air Bomber Output from the UK and Canada

Source: AP3233 – RAF Flying Training, Vol 1

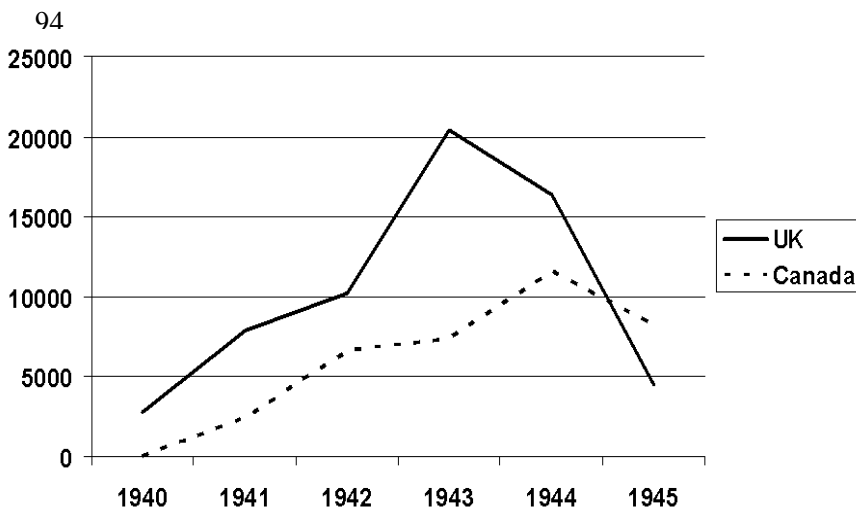


Fig 4. Annual WOp/AG & Flt Eng Output from the UK and Canada
 Source: AP3233 – RAF Flying Training, Vol 1

more than trebling the previous rate and requiring a huge expansion of training facilities. At the time, this domestic requirement precluded any space being allocated to Great Britain, even if that had been possible, which it was not, because of the constraints imposed by the US Neutrality Laws. Nevertheless, the Roosevelt Administration came increasingly to appreciate that the UK actually constituted America's first line of defence and ways and means were devised to overcome these limitations. There were eventually five American schemes.

The Refresher Schools. During the summer of 1940 the Air Ministry asked Clayton Knight, an American who was already quietly recruiting American pilots to fly with the RCAF as instructors and/or to ferry aeroplanes across the Atlantic, to see if he could find some specifically for the RAF. Since 1939 the US Civil Aeronautics Authority had been offering college students the opportunity to learn to fly under a scheme intended to create a national reserve of part-trained pilots; this was not unlike our own RAFVR but without the military trimmings.¹⁹ As a result, there was a large pool of young Americans with approaching 100 hours under their belts but who could not afford to pay for the extra time necessary to reach the 150 hours required by the British.

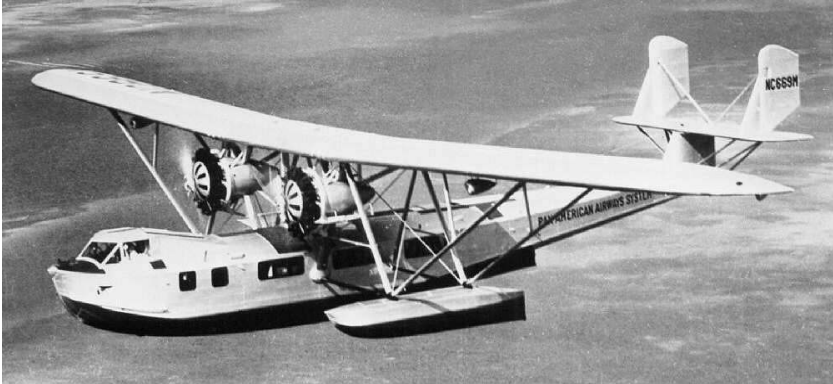
In August 1940, and with tacit US sanction, Knight was permitted

Where trained	AF	Pilots	Obs/Navs	AB	WOp/AG	AG	FE	Total
UK	RAF	15,287	9,869	728	27,190	28,243	17,885	99,202
	IAF	15	4	1	6	2		28
	Total	15,302	9,873	729	27,196	28,245	17,885	99,230
Canada	RAF	22,068	15,778	7,581	755	2,096		48,278
	RCAF	25,918	12,855	6,659	12,744	12,917	1,913	73,006
	RAAF	4,045	1,643	799	2,875	244		9,606
	RNZAF	2,220	1,583	634	2,122	443		7,002
	IAF	18						18
Total	54,269	31,859	15,673	18,496	15,700	1,913	369	137,910
Australia	RAAF	10,998	5,929	159	7,158	3,286		27,959
	RNZAF	6,118	165			208		6,491
SA	RAF	4,227	10,170	2,404		445		17,246
	SAAF	4,123	2,072	56	1,909	622	79	8,861
	Total	8,350	12,242	2,460	1,909	1,067	79	26,107
SR	RAF	7,216	717			1,591		9,524
	RAAF	514	61			8		583
	Total	7,730	778			1,599		10,107
India	RAF	165	21				14	200
	IAF	791	93		185	17		1,086
	Total	956	114		185	17	14	1,286
ME	RAF	273	38					1,472
USA	RAF	13,673	1,715		662			16,050
Grand Totals	RAF	62,909	38,308	10,713	28,607	33,536	17,899	191,972
	RCAF	25,918	12,855	6,659	12,744	12,917	1,913	73,006
	RAAF	15,557	7,633	958	10,033	3,538	369	38,088
	RNZAF	8,338	1,748	634	2,122	651		13,493
	SAAF	4,123	2,072	56	1,909	622	79	8,861
	IAF	824	97	1	191	19		1,132
Total	117,669	62,713	19,021	55,606	51,283	20,260	326,552	

Fig 5. Analysis by Air Force of Output of Qualified Aircrew During WW II.

Source: AP3233 – RAF Flying Training, Vol 1

NB The RAF figures include approximately 8,750 foreign nationals (Belgian, Czech, Dutch, Yugoslav, Polish, French, Danish, Greek) trained at various locations plus 3,792 FAA personnel (2,808 pilots and 704 AGs) trained in Canada. The US total includes the 598 trained by the (pre-Arnold Scheme) Refresher Schools, but not the 558 USAAF cadets trained at the BFTSs.



One of PanAm's Consolidated Commodores.

to arrange for civilian-run schools to provide potential recruits with at least 80 hours in their log books with the additional 70 required to qualify them to fly with 'British Aviation Ltd', a dummy commercial corporation that would 'employ' them until they could be transported across the border where they could be formally inducted into the RAF. Originally equipped with a variety of civilian trainer aircraft, these were eventually replaced, notwithstanding the USA's neutral stance, by Government-supplied PT-17s and AT-6s – Stearmans and Harvards. The, eventually, four so-called Refresher Schools²⁰ produced 598 pilots at a cost of about \$1,000 per head.

The Pan American Scheme. Like the RAF, the USAAC had not bothered with dedicated navigators between the wars. The penny finally dropped, however, and in August 1940 the US Army contracted Pan American Airways to train 850 flight navigators.²¹ As early as October the Americans offered to make *all* of these places available to the RAF.²² This offer was accepted, although the British never filled 100% of the available slots, the bulk of the throughput still being Americans.

The first batch of ten RAF cadets (the first RAF trainees to reach the USA) arrived at the PanAm school, which was embedded within Miami University, in March 1941. The AHB monograph notes that 'The Miami College was co-educational and in all ways the reception given to the British cadets was extremely friendly.'²³ The syllabus, over which the RAF was, initially at least, able to exert little influence



A Stearman PT-17 of No 6 BFTS, Ponca City, OK.

turned out to be something of a curate's egg. Its strength lay in astro, which was well taught but, because PanAm was an airline, its only concern was getting from A to B; it had little appreciation of aviation in a military context and, understandably, it provided no instruction in tactical matters relating to reconnaissance techniques, search procedures, signalling and photography, let alone bomb-aiming and gunnery.

The practical aspects of the course also left much to be desired as the only aeroplanes available for airborne work were four Consolidated Commodores. The contract called for each cadet to spend fifty hours in the air (half of them at night) but, flying in batches of up to ten at a time, only four or five of these hours were spent as 'navigator in charge' – which meant that the essential 'adrenaline factor' was lacking.²⁴ Nevertheless, the RAF was pleased to take advantage of these facilities. The last British course to use them graduated in October 1942, by which time Pan American Airways had trained 1,177 observers for the RAF.²⁵

The British Flying Training Schools – the BFTSs. On 6 March 1941, on the specific direction of the President, Maj-Gen Hap Arnold, Chief of the US Army Air Corps, offered to set up in the USA, six civilian-run schools, to train RAF pilots to 'wings' standard via a 20-week, 150-hour course (raised in January 1942 to 28 weeks and 200 hours). They were to be equipped with no fewer than 545 aeroplanes, all which would be furnished by the US Government



North American AT-6s – mainstay of the Arnold Scheme.

under Lend-Lease.²⁶ Although the instructors would be Americans, training at each school would be overseen by an RAF wing commander and a small staff and conducted against the standard RAF syllabus.

The first BFTS was commissioned on 13 July 1941²⁷ and all six were functioning before the end of August. A student would progress from a Stearman primary trainer via (until 1943) a BT-13 for the basic phase to complete the course on an AT-6 – the Harvard. Following America's entry into the war, some of the capacity of the BFTSs was given over to the US Army, the total output of the six schools eventually amounting to 6,921 pilots for the RAF and 558 for the USAAF.²⁸

The Arnold Scheme. In the course of a visit to the UK in April 1941, only a month after he had announced the BFTS scheme, General Arnold made the RAF the astoundingly generous offer of one third of the US Army's pilot training capacity – the so-called Arnold Scheme. The first cohort of RAF students started training on 10 June, just one day after the first BFTS courses began – and just eight weeks after the offer had been made. As with the BFTSs, although the aeroplanes

were furnished by the government, the schools training US Army cadets were run by civilian contractors. The types flown were much the same as at the British schools, except that the Arnold Scheme included live gunnery on AT-6s for pilots earmarked for single-seaters while those selected to fly heavier aircraft did the advanced phase on the Cessna AT-17 Bobcat or the Curtiss AT-9, which was something of a 'hot ship'. The BFTSs did not offer multi-engine training, incidentally, which was something of a drawback as the RAF needed a lot of those.

By the time that the last course graduated in March 1943, the Arnold Scheme had provided the RAF with 4,370 pilots. Interestingly, at about 45%, the wash-out rate under the Arnold Scheme was twice that at the BFTSs. There are two probable reasons for that. First, Arnold trainees attended different schools for each of the three phases of the course, whereas BFTS students did an all-through course, providing much better continuity. Secondly, some British cadets were alienated by some American military customs, including the West Point-style of discipline and the 'honour code' imposed at the Arnold Schools, whereas the BFTSs ran on more relaxed lines.

The Towers Scheme. In parallel with the Army, on 18 June 1941, Admiral John Towers, the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, had offered the British the use of US Navy facilities to train pilots – and observers and wireless operators – to operate flying boats or from carrier decks. This, fifth, American initiative was implemented even faster than the Army scheme and the first course arrived at Pensacola just five weeks later. The Navy used much the same aeroplanes as the Army for basic pilot training, but it became more complicated later for pilots destined for seaplanes. They were likely to start on N3N or Vought Kingfisher floatplanes, Kingfishers also being used to train wireless operators, before joining the observers on rather aged Consolidated P2Y flying boats or early model Catalinas. The original idea had been to produce fully trained crews but Pearl Harbor changed American priorities and this became impractical. As a result, the last RAF observers and wireless operators graduated in July and September 1942 respectively, although pilots for both the RAF and the FAA continued to be trained for another two years. The total output amounted to 1,784 pilots; 538 observers and 662 WOps

Scheme	Category	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	Total
Refresher	Pilots	425	173	–	–	–	598
PAA	Observers	307	870	–	–	–	1,177
BFTS	Pilots	349	1,612	1,862	1,587	1,511	6,921
Arnold	Pilots	230	3,401	739	–	–	4,370
Towers	Pilots	–	503	698	583	–	1,784
	Observers	60	478	–	–	–	538
	WOp/AGs	30	632	–	–	–	662
Totals	Pilots	1,004	5,689	3,299	2,170	1,511	13,673
	Observers	367	1,348	–	–	–	1,715
	WOp/AGs	30	632	–	–	–	662
Totals		1,401	7,669	3,299	2,170	1,511	16,050

Fig 6. Output of RAF aircrew from the USA during WW II.

And so to the last lap, the post-war years. Already in sharp decline, even before the end of the European War, the whole training machine had virtually ground to a halt well before VJ-Day, the BCATP as early as March. It took the RAF, the entire UK really, a year or two to begin to get its post-war act together and it was the spring of 1947 before there were many signs of life within the domestic training system and the only overseas element that had survived – just – was the Rhodesian Air Training Group. This began to come back to life at much the same time when No 4 FTS opened at Heany in February 1947, thus preserving the warm climate facility that the same unit had provided in Egypt between the wars.

By 1950, the training system was back on an even keel and running reasonably smoothly – and then the Korean War broke out. The consequent rearmament programme put considerable strain on the domestic capacity and Canada stepped into the breach for a third time. Initially the RCAF agreed to train 300 RAF pilots per year under a bilateral agreement but this was soon absorbed into the multinational NATO Air Training Plan, which was similar to, but rather less parochial than, the wartime Commonwealth scheme. This gave the RAF some problems as it was now obliged to compete against a



The Nene-engined, Canadair-built CT-133 as used by the NATO Air Training Plan in the mid-1950s.

number of other bidders for an annual allocation of places, which made long-term planning difficult. Other difficulties arose from the RAF's policy of training National Servicemen as aircrew, which did not sit well with NATO, especially the USA. The Americans were contributing, free of charge, large numbers of very expensive aeroplanes in order to create a much stronger front-line. The Europeans were expected to play their part by providing combat-ready aircrew; ex-conscript reservists were not considered to be a good fit.

These reservations were overcome, however and between 1951 and 1958, when it wound up, the NATO Air Training Plan produced 3,218 aircrew for the RCAF plus another 5,299 for other NATO nations, more than half them, approximately 1,800 navigators and 2,000 pilots, for the UK and, incidentally, permitting the RAF to shut down the Rhodesian schools, this time for good.²⁹

All that was more than half-a-century ago, of course, and it was more or less the end of the overseas game. Ever since the 1957 Defence White Paper, the RAF has been in a progressive state of quantitative, which is not to say qualitative, decline, although there was a brief flirtation with both the Australians and the Canadians at the turn of the century. The RAAF link was relatively brief and came about as a result of an engineering defect with the Tucano fleet in 2000; in order to sustain the flow of pilot training, we sent a few



One of the CT-155 Hawk Mk 115s operated by Bombardier under contract to the NFTC.

courses to Pearce AFB at Perth until the problem was solved.

At much the same time, July 1999, the RAF had also bought into yet another Canadian enterprise, the NFTC – NATO Flying Training in Canada – which provides a comprehensive, contractor-run, fast-jet syllabus from basic flying training up to entry to OCU standard. The RAF undertook to send twenty students per year from 2000 to 2020 to do just Phase IV, the tactical Hawk element of the course. While not actually ‘withdrawing’ from the scheme, in 2008 the RAF ‘reduced its throughput to zero’ and once the last UK students had passed through the seven RAF QFIs were recalled.

An aspect of internationalism that I have not yet mentioned is the provision of flying training in the UK, to the air forces of other nations. The RAF used to do this quite extensively – and profitably. When No 6 FTS was failing to train me (and a lot of other people) to become a pilot in 1960, I was rubbing shoulders at Ternhill with Ghanaians, Sudanese, Lebanese, Jordanians, Malaysians and Indonesians (and there were Iraqis, Syrians and Kenyans elsewhere within the system at that time) but, as an instructor at No 6 FTS in the mid-1970s, I taught only Nigerian navigators.

More recently, between 2004 and 2007 a total of 72 Indian Air Force pilots (twelve courses of six) did the Hawk Course at Valley but the thirteenth course were all QFIs and since then the Indians have been doing it themselves on their own Hawks.

And I believe that that has been more or less it, of late. Sadly, it would appear that, in the UK training game, as Lionel Bart put it, ‘Fings ain’t wot they used to be.’

Notes:

¹ TNA AIR1/683/21/13/2234. This file includes an AHB précis tabulating the monthly output of trained pilots. It does not embrace the whole of WW I, but it does record that, in Egypt, the first cohort of pilots graduated in November 1916 and that by 15 April 1918, the total had reached 852.

TNA AIR1/408/15/240/2 contains a good deal of contemporary statistical information up to November 1918 but, because of the way in which the figures were recorded, it is difficult (if not impossible) to interpret them to produce, with any confidence, a definitive total of pilots trained in Egypt.

² Kostenuk, S and Griffin, J; *RCAF Squadrons and Aircraft* (Toronto, 1977) p2.

³ Chris Hobson's very comprehensive *Airmen Died in the Great War 1914-1918* (Hayward & Sons, 1995) features appendices providing a statistical breakdown of fatalities, not all of which were air-related, of course. The combined RFC/RAF total comes to 8,417, only 6,305 of whom died in aeroplanes. Allowing that some of these were 'passengers' and that most of the 2,112 who succumbed to other causes, notably including influenza, will have been groundcrew, it is reasonable to assume that the number of *aircrew* who died will have been of the order of 5,500.

⁴ Lord Riverdale of Sheffield was the erstwhile Sir Arthur Balfour.

⁵ Dunmore, Spencer; *Wings for Victory* (Toronto, 1994) p41.

⁶ After flying with the RNAS/RAF during WW I, Robert Leckie had returned to Canada for a brief period but, like several of his compatriots, he opted to remain with the RAF. By 1940 he was AOC RAF Mediterranean, an air commodore with his HQ on Malta. From there he was posted to Canada to oversee the implementation of the Riverdale Agreement. In 1942, by then an air vice-marshal, Leckie transferred his commission to the RCAF, eventually becoming its CAS as an air marshal, 1944-47.

⁷ TNA AIR8/3160 contains a copy of the Report (to the UK Government) on the Riverdale Mission to Canada, dated December 1939, and a copy of the Agreement itself.

⁸ TNA AIR2/1360. Office Memorandum 15/40 dated 23 January 1940 announcing the setting up of the EATS Committee.

⁹ TNA AIR46/7. This file contains the international correspondence dealing with the implementation of Article XV of the Riverdale Agreement. It includes numerous variations on the theme of the title of the project, all of which studiously avoid using the words 'empire' or 'imperial'.

¹⁰ As in the UK, the operation and staffing of many wartime Canadian training schools was carried out by civilians under contract to the RCAF.

¹¹ Starting in late-1940, by 1942 a total of twenty-five RAF flying training units had been established in Canada, some of them by moving an existing unit across the Atlantic. They were: six elementary flying training schools; ten service flying training schools; three air navigation schools; one bombing and gunnery school; one general reconnaissance school and four operational training units.

¹² While this paper is concerned only with basic flying training, to illustrate the extent to which the RCAF could exercise authority over RAF units, it is interesting to note that, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Air Force Headquarters directed that No 32 OTU (an RAF unit training torpedo-bomber crews)

was to cease training and conduct operational patrols.

¹³ This circumstance was not considered to have arisen until the start of the East African campaign in June 1940, and even then the SAAF was confined to operations on the African continent until mid-1943 when it was eventually permitted to cross the Mediterranean to fight in Italy. Despite these constraints, a number of SAAF personnel on secondment to the RAF did fly on operations elsewhere, in theatres as remote (to South Africa) as North West Europe and Burma.

¹⁴ This agreement was named after the chief negotiators for each side, General Sir Pierre Van Ryneveld for the Union of South Africa and Air Chf Mshl Sir Robert Brooke-Popham for the UK.

¹⁵ During 1940 sufficient resources were despatched to South Africa to establish a Combined Air Observers Navigation and Gunnery School, two Air Observers Navigation Schools (these became Nos 42, 45 and 47 Air Schools in November 1940) and a General Reconnaissance School (later No 61 Air School) and in 1941 a Combined Air Observers School was set up in Rhodesia.

¹⁶ To be pedantic, Southern Rhodesia actually had the constitutional status of a self-governing colony. This gave it such a degree of autonomy, however, that in practical terms it tended to regard itself (and it was often treated) as 'the fifth white Dominion'.

¹⁷ For example, F J Hatch's officially sponsored history of the Canadian enterprise, *Aerodrome of Democracy* (Ottawa, 1983), does not even include 'EATS' in its glossary.

¹⁸ The AHB total (in which notionally RAF figures actually include FAA personnel) reflects all aircrew trained in Canada during WW II, ie between 3 September 1939 and 15 August 1945; the Canadian figure is strictly confined to the output of the BCATP and thus excludes 171 RCAF pilots who qualified before the first EATS course graduated in October 1940, 5,296 aircrew trained by the RAF 'transferred schools' prior to their absorption into the BCATP in 1942 and 890 who graduated after the formal closure of the BCATP in March 1945.

¹⁹ Resembling the RAFVR, to the extent that it was run by civilian contractors and set out to produce a national pool of part-trained pilots, the US Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) was instituted in 1939. Its graduates were certified as 'restricted commercial pilots', a standard that equated to completion of the primary phase of the contemporary US military flying course, and were qualified for further flying training, although (other than by enlisting in one of the armed services) this was not publicly funded.

²⁰ The four Refresher Schools were at Tulsa OK, Dallas TX, Glendale (later Lancaster) CA and Bakersfield CA.

²¹ Like the RAF, the USAAC had relied on pilots to handle navigation between the wars and, again like the RAF, albeit rather later, when it began to expand it concluded that it would need to employ dedicated non-pilot aircrew, hence PAA's being contracted to train navigators. The first class graduated in November 1940, still as cadets, because it had not yet been decided what the status of navigators was to be. It was July 1941 before they were commissioned in the rank of lieutenant, formally establishing in the process the category of the 'aircraft observer (aerial navigator)'. See *Air Force Navigators Observers* (various contributors, Turner Pub Co: Paducah,

KY, 1997) for an account of the history of the navigator in the USAAF/USAF,

²² TNA AIR2/8065. The first formal offer to train RAF observers was notified to London by signal X.1593 transmitted from Washington by the British Air Attaché on 17 October 1940.

²³ TNA AIR41/70. *Flying Training During World War II: Vol 2, Pt 2; Basic Training Overseas*, p631.

²⁴ TNA AIR2/4459. This file contains a number of reports on the competence of early graduates of the PAA School, a particularly informative example being that raised by No 23 OTU on 6 January 1942 and appended to HQ Bomber Command letter BC/S.24606/Trg dated 19 January.

²⁵ This figure, is taken from the official British accounting, as published in AP3233, Vol 1. In a painstaking, and much later, analysis of the Arnold Scheme [Gilbert S Guinn, *The Arnold Scheme* (Charleston SC, 2007)], the author calculates, with evident confidence, that the actual output from the PAA school was only 1,170 trained observers, compared to the official 1,177.

²⁶ This offer actually pre-dated the Lend-Lease Act of 11 March 1941 and it is an indication of the esteem in which Hap Arnold was held that the proprietors of the commercial schools that were to participate in the scheme undertook to do so on the basis of his personal assurance that the funding, which was not yet in place, would be forthcoming.

²⁷ Training actually began at Nos 1 and 2 BFTSs on 9 June but, because the dedicated facilities were not quite ready, the first courses started at adjacent schools being run by the same civilian contractors to train US Army cadets; similar arrangements were made for the first courses at Nos 3 and 4 BFTSs on 16 June and No 5 BFTS on 17 July.

²⁸ Using the resources of the three remaining Refresher Schools (at Lancaster, Tulsa and Bakersfield), an additional school, No 7 BFTS, opened at Sweetwater TX on 18 June 1942 but it closed in August, having completed only the primary phase of one course.

²⁹ Between 1947 and 1954 the post-war RATG had trained 1,175 pilots and 280 navigators.

CFS EXAMINING WING AND ITS WORK OVERSEAS, 1987-89

Gp Capt Tom Eeles



Tom Eeles joined the RAF via Cranwell in 1960. His post-graduate flying experience embraced the Canberra, Gnat, Hunter and, especially, the Buccaneer, culminating in a tour as OC 237 OCU in 1984-87. After two years with the CFS as OC Examining Wing, he did a stint at HQ Support Command before commanding RAF Linton-on-Ouse; his final appointment was with Defence Exports Services Organisation within MoD. On leaving the Service in 1997 he was commissioned into the RAF Reserve to serve, initially, with Cambridge UAS and today he continues to fly with No 5 AEF.

At the end of the war, in 1945, the Central Flying School (CFS) was reformed at RAF Little Rissington. The Examining Wing, which had not existed during the war years, was re-established to function very much as it had pre-war, as a checking organisation for flying instructor standards and the authority for confirming and upgrading instructor categories. During the immediate post war years, when many nations that had been part of the Empire gained their independence, such as Rhodesia, Kenya, Pakistan, India, Ceylon and Malaya, air forces were formed in these countries modelled very much on the RAF template and with active RAF assistance. There also remained the air forces of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa that retained strong ties with the RAF, and air forces of other nations, such as Jordan, where King Hussein was the Honorary Air Commodore of 6 Squadron, which forged strong links with the RAF. The CFS inevitably found itself heavily involved with these overseas air forces, both in training their instructors in the UK and sending Examining Wing teams to audit their activities in-country. The British aircraft industry provided many of the aircraft for these air forces, either in the form of surplus wartime aircraft or 'new build' such as the Vampire, Meteor, Canberra, Chipmunk, Hunter, Provost and Jet Provost. In 1953 alone a total of some 3,000 tests was carried out in

Britain, Germany, the Middle East, Africa, Pakistan, Ceylon, Malaya and Hong Kong.

Despite this busy environment, Examining Wing did not always find favour with the senior Command staff. In 1956 the CinC of Flying Training Command, Air Marshal Atcherley, maintained that 'examining without teaching was soul-destroying' and that CFS could not afford to keep twenty pilots separate from the instructional task. Examining Wing was disbanded and a new set up known as Directing Staff, CFS, was established. This in turn became known as Standards Wing until 1966 when it reverted to its original title of Examining Wing. The 1970s was a period of considerable upheaval for CFS. Little Rissington, long considered an inadequate airfield for flying training, was closed in 1976 and CFS moved to Cranwell, and then onwards again to Leeming. However, Leeming had already been earmarked as an air defence base, so CFS moved again in 1984 to Scampton, where it rejoined the RAF Aerobatic Team that had moved there from Kemble and for which it was still responsible.

By 1987 CFS remained an organisation that was still well respected by many of the world's air forces, despite its influence having steadily diminished both at home and abroad. It was an independent formation of Group status, commanded by a one-star officer and it had the Royal cachet in the form of HRH the Queen Mother as its Commandant-in-Chief. It was well established at RAF Scampton, where all flying instructor training, apart from rotary and advanced jet, was undertaken. Examining Wing, commanded by a wing commander (a fast jet QFI), reported direct to, and was tasked by the Commandant. There were four basic QFIs, responsible for elementary and basic examining (which included checking those flying clubs that provided flying scholarships for the Air Cadets), two fast jet and one multi-engine examiner; detached at RAF Shawbury were two rotary examiners.

Examining Wing's domestic task consisted of upgrading QFI categories for instructors of all three Services, undertaking quality control audits, or 'Trappers' visits to many Service flying units and overseeing the CFS agency scheme, whereby selected front line instructors worked as CFS representatives on their front line aircraft, providing vital feedback on operational flying to the training establishment. In addition, the Wing received invitations to visit

foreign air forces and to conduct similar quality control and assessment visits, culminating with an in depth verbal report to the appropriate Commander, followed up by a written report under the signature of Commandant CFS. However, the frequency of these overseas visits was much less than in the past. Many overseas air forces had moved away from their original RAF roots; by the 1980s products of the British aircraft industry were far less in evidence overseas, having been superseded in many countries by US, French or Russian aircraft, the exception being the BAe Hawk advanced trainer. The influence and culture of the nation providing equipment was bound to predominate in the customer air force. Concerns over security meant that Examining Wing's overseas visits to some nations, for example Singapore, tended to be restricted to training rather than operational units, however, CFS agents from appropriate front line units and Qualified Weapons Instructors would often join a CFS team if required by the hosting nation.

The sortie content of a 'Trappers ride' overseas would depend very much on the status of the individual flown with. A student pilot would be asked to fly a general handling sortie appropriate to his experience and the stage he had reached on his course. This would include some form of emergency handling, and often some genuine flying instruction should the host nation staff request it. Many overseas flying instructors were CFS graduates, so they would be asked to brief and fly a typical instructional task with the examiner taking the role of student. General handling flying skills and emergency procedures would also be undertaken. If the instructor possessed a CFS instructional category it could be upgraded should his performance merit it, but this would also involve a ground oral test. Qualified pilots who were not instructors might be asked to undertake a routine task typical of their specialisation, or simply fly a general handling sortie; the Examining Team would try not to disrupt the unit's routine excessively in order to maintain cordial relations, and would often form part of a crew on a training or operational task, using the sortie profile as a method of assessment.

Let me turn now to some specific overseas visits undertaken during my tour as OC Examining Wing, 1987-1989. Typical of one of the largest overseas visits was the annual assessment of what was then titled the Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF), now the Royal Air



The SOAF's Thumrait-based Hunters were 'flown with great élan'.

Force of Oman (RAFO), commanded at the time by the charismatic Air Marshal Erik Bennett and manned by a mixture of Omanis, expatriot British on contracts and some loan service officers. It was a heady mixture to become involved with as the flying environment was considerably more vibrant and much less reg-

ulated then the domestic RAF scene.

Additionally, after the long two-stage flight out in a SOAF BAC-111, there was the challenge of flying an aircraft which you had never been in before – in my case the Shorts Skyvan used by SOAF in the light tactical transport role – with the need to muster all the skill and authority of a CFS examiner.

One would often be crewed with a young Omani aviator whose grasp of English might be rather tenuous and who would be somewhat overawed by your presence. The cargo could easily have included the occasional goat and some locals who might never have been in an aircraft before. Some of the strips were very primitive, I recall one close to the Yemeni border where, after landing, we had to keep rolling, whilst discharging cargo and passengers 'at the run' before getting airborne again, all the while being tracked by the Yemeni ZSU-23/4 anti-aircraft batteries just the other side of the strip boundary/national border. It was a far cry indeed from flying with a QFI in a Jetstream at Finningley.

A total contrast was provided when flying with the Hunter squadron based near Salalah up in the desert at Thumrait. The aircraft was well equipped, carrying two Sidewinders in addition to its 30mm cannon, rocket and bomb armament, and was flown with great élan by its pilots in an environment virtually totally free of any form of restriction or regulation. At the time of the 1988 visit the cross-border war with dissident elements in the Yemen had only just petered out so flying with the Hunter squadron was very much 'war time operations'. Establishing one's authority and credibility as a 'Trapper' in this very



Preparing to lay out a beer can flarepath in the desert.

operational scenario was challenging, to say the least, despite complete familiarity with the aircraft, as general handling exercises and practise emergencies were not top of these pilot's priorities .

A somewhat more relaxing, but nevertheless unique, experience was flying out into the desert in a pair of Skyvans one late afternoon, the cargo consisting of two dustbin sacks of empty beer tins, two jerry cans of petrol, three rolls of 4×2 and three hot-locks full of curry. We set down in a suitable flat bit of desert, unloaded the cargo and set about pacing out a landing strip marked by the empty beer cans. These were then filled with petrol and strips of 4×2 were inserted to act as wicks. We then settled down to eat our curries, sitting under the wings of the Skyvans as the sun set. Once it was dark the beer can flare path was lit, the aircraft started up and we proceeded to fly night circuits in the inky darkness of the desert, far away from the brightly lit busy international airport at Seeb, the Skyvan squadron's home base. When the last of the flare path flickered out we returned, crossing the Jebel Akhdar massif, to land at Seeb in time for a night-cap (non-alcoholic) in the Officer's Mess. It was a unique experience.

The regular and close liaison between the RAF, CFS and SOAF, which still continues, has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the



The CFS team at Seeb in 1988. Left to right: Sqn Ldr Da Costa (multi-engine); Flt Lt English (rotary); Wg Cdr Eeles (fast jet and multi-engine); Flt Lt Foster (basic); Sqn Ldr Brian Fuller (fast jet); Sqn Ldr Lawrence (multi-engine).

acknowledged effectiveness and organisation of the RAFO today.

Typical of a smaller, and somewhat more difficult, overseas task was a visit to the Royal Jordanian Air Force. No ex-pats to help us here, we were thrown into a very alien environment and culture, in a country with a hostile Israeli Air Force on its western border, and Iraq, at that time actively engaged in its war with Iran, to the east. The senior commanders, many of whom had been trained in the UK with the RAF and were Cranwell or CFS graduates were welcoming and supportive, being keen to maintain the links with the RAF. However, we were greeted with less enthusiasm by the more junior members of the air force who had grown up in an era when British influence had been much less in Jordan.

By this time their front line equipment was sourced exclusively from the USA and France, with only the Bulldog trainer remaining as a British aircraft. Language barriers were considerably greater, and flying, from the back seat, an American fast jet, the F-5, that I had never been close to before was a serious challenge to one's credibility.



Among the more unfamiliar environments encountered by the 'Trappers' was the back seat of a Jordanian F-5.

Our task was to fly with the staff and students of the F-5 Operational Conversion Unit, whilst my basic and rotary examiners flew with the basic fixed wing and rotary establishments. Living conditions at H5, the F-5 base, out in the desert, were somewhat rudimentary, and the duty 'mutton grab' formal lunch to which we were invited as honoured guests

was difficult to digest successfully without offending our hosts! Nevertheless the visit was a success, our report accepted gratefully and I like to think that ties between our two air forces and countries were indeed strengthened.

A somewhat different, and more hedonistic, visit was that to the Dubai Air Wing of the UAE Air Force. Dubai was a very different place to Jordan, with conspicuous wealth and consumption being evident as long ago as the late 1980s. The small Dubai Air Wing's front line was equipped with Macchi MB326 and 329 basic jet trainers and Hawk advanced fighter/trainers, in addition to small rotary and basic training units. The loan service squadron leader explained during our in-brief that only those from the upper reaches of Dubai's hierarchy flew the jets, and he advised us to take particular care not to get in their way as we drove to the brand new air base every morning as they swept by at high speed in their expensive cars, blatantly ignoring the speed limit.

Again, the flying was restricted to the training units but the presence of the loan service RAF officer, a well known fast jet expert, certainly made matters much easier. Nevertheless, observations on flying skills had to be delivered with great care and tact, but at least we were familiar with their main training aircraft, the Hawk. It was fascinating at the end of the working day to see the military police holding up the traffic as the fighter pilots all left the air base in a high speed convoy back to their palaces at cease work. They even wanted



An SIAI-Marchetti SF260 elementary trainer at Seletar.

us to examine their flying ability in their personal micro-lights, which was a welcome diversion from the main task. Whether much note was taken of our final report remains unknown!

A far more robust and workmanlike visit was undertaken to the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF), again with a large team covering all disciplines and lasting for two weeks without a break, the RSAF having embraced the Singaporean work ethic with huge enthusiasm. Despite the Republic having distanced itself somewhat from its former colonial master there was still great affection for the RAF, particularly amongst the older generation of officers who recalled the setting up of their Service with RAF help on the achievement of independence. Unlike the Oman, however, there was very little evidence of RAF style organisation any more, with a greater reliance on US methods and equipment. The only British aircraft remaining in the inventory was the Hunter, and that was to be phased out very soon.

The Singaporeans impressed us as being extremely competent and hard working; our comments and observations were acknowledged but it was clear that the links to the past were fast disappearing. All requests to visit Tengah for old times sake were consistently refused on the grounds of security, the airfield being NOTAMed as 'unavailable as a diversion' for the whole of our visit until the day of the team's departure.



A Kenyan Hawk at Mombasa Airport.

As before, the team's flying was restricted to the training units, although our QWI was permitted to fly with pilots from the Skyhawk and Hunter conversion units. My picture shows a Singaporean SF260 on the ramp at

Seletar, the original RAF base in Singapore, which still showed many signs of its origins. It was nice to drive around the old Changi domestic site on my one afternoon off and see that Cranwell Crescent, Pavon Drive and the like were still very much in evidence!

My final visit, in 1989, was to Kenya, possibly the most interesting visit of all. In 1982 there was an uprising in Kenya, actively supported by the then named Kenya Air Force. This had been suppressed with considerable force. A number of air force personnel were purged and a new organisation, the '82 Air Force', was formed from the remnants of the Kenya Air Force. This service was strictly under the control of the Kenyan Army, who had remained loyal to the regime during the uprising. Before departing my small team and I were briefed that relations between the UK and Kenya had been strained, that this visit was the first for some time and that it had taken much diplomacy to get approval. It was, therefore, to be conducted more as an exercise in assistance rather than an assessment of capability, as London was keen to see an improvement in relations between the two countries.

On arrival our hosts in the 82 Air Force were delighted to see us but it was soon apparent that they were desperately badly off for resources and facilities. Very scrappy blackboards and chalk were the principal briefing aids. It was obvious that they resented the presence of the Army; each Base Commander was an army officer who outranked the senior airman and his small team of army colleagues seemed to be there to ensure that as soon as the airmen started to achieve some success in their activities, they were diverted away to do something else. Pilots complained about being sent off as guard commanders at the presidential palace for months at a stretch. The

pilots were enthusiastic but very short of flying hours and experience.

None of the Strikemasters had been flown for months, the only operational jet aircraft being some F-5s, supplied by the USA with appropriate technical assistance, and some Hawks. An ongoing dispute with BAe over bill payment restricted Hawk serviceability and no Hawk air-to-air firing had been carried out for more than three years, but it was arranged for our benefit, with predictably mixed results. The services of our co-opted QWI were very much in demand.

The predominant colour scheme for everything from uniforms to the painting of the base main gates was a mixture of black and pastel pink. When I remarked on this odd combination of colours to an ex-pat wild life ranger at a social event, he replied that 'those are the colours the Masai make their traitors wear!' The Army's tribal make up was predominantly Masai, whilst the 82 Air Force was mainly Kikuyu, and the two tribal cultures never mixed. We rose greatly in the 82 Air Force's estimation when my multi-engine examiner got involved in a major search and rescue operation in the wilds of the north of Kenya, so at the end of the day the visit was deemed to have been very successful, but I often wonder what state the 82 Air Force of Kenya is in today.

There was still time on most of these visits to enjoy some local culture and entertainment, even the Singaporeans didn't fly all 24 hours of the day. Touring a game reserve in Kenya and bestriding the equator, driving in the sand dunes of Dubai, snorkelling off the coast of Oman and visiting Petra are just some of the memories I have.

Another type of overseas visit undertaken by CFS worth mentioning is the Commandant's Liaison Visit. Every year the Commandant would take a small team of instructors, usually numbering no more than five, on a visit to an overseas air force to discuss matters of mutual interest. The visit would be by invitation and tended to come mainly from Commonwealth nations although visits to other countries, such as the USA, Finland and Switzerland were typical.

In 1987, when the Swiss Air Force announced that it was ordering the BAe Hawk as its new advanced trainer, the Commandant was invited to Switzerland to meet the Swiss Air Force and brief its senior staff on the RAF's experience with the Hawk. Accompanying him were myself, my fast jet examiner (ex-Harrier), a member of staff



Final – Sion airfield.

from the Tactical Weapons Unit at Chivenor and two senior instructors from No 4 FTS at Valley. We flew out in our own Jetstream, piloted by myself and my colleague, which hopefully created a favourable initial impression with our hosts on arrival.

The visit was fascinating and entertaining, we flew into some dramatic airfields amongst the Alps – like Sion. The

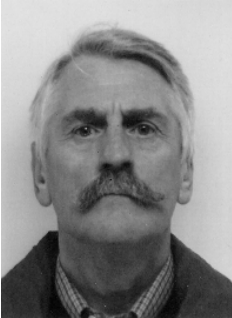
Swiss Air Force still flew Venoms and Hunters and was looking forward to acquiring a more modern fast jet trainer than the Venom. We were flown in PC7 trainers around the mountains and witnessed air to ground gunnery and rocket firing from Hunters at an amazing mountain top weapons range.

Although the Swiss Air Force now no longer operates the Hawk, I believe our visit was a useful exercise in smoothing the introduction of a new type into the Swiss inventory.

In conclusion, these visits undoubtedly assisted foreign air forces by allowing an outside independent audit of their work to be undertaken, and enhanced the reputation of the RAF and the CFS abroad and, at times, assisted the British aircraft industry. There is no doubt, however, that by the late 1980s British influence in many of the overseas air forces that had close ties to the RAF in their early days was on the wane. Other nations' influence, particularly those who provided technical assistance and equipment, was clearly taking over in many areas once considered traditional British territory. Today, some twenty years on from my time as OC Examining Wing, with the reduction in size and authority of CFS, which has lost its one-star, its Royal patronage and its dedicated operating base, I suspect that the RAF and CFS's influence on overseas air forces has reduced even further.

LOAN SERVICE WITH THE SULTAN OF OMAN'S AIR FORCE

Gp Capt Geoff Brindle



Geoff Brindle joined the RAF in 1964 and flew Lightnings (Nos 2, 56 and 11 Sqns) before switching to Phantoms and commanding Nos 56 and 23 Sqns and RAF Wildenrath. Staff appointments included stints at MOD, HQs 11 Gp, STC and AAFCE and twice in Oman, 1984-86 with SOAF and 1996-2004 with RAFO. He is currently involved in the management of air displays at home and abroad and has been the Display Director for RIAT at Fairford.

Introduction

Oman's geostrategic location at the entry point of the Strait of Hormuz and its lengthy coastline overseeing the traditional trade routes has long attracted the interests of foreign powers. Historically, Oman has perforce relied on the influence of these foreign powers to ensure political stability both regionally and, in certain circumstances, domestically.

Relations with the British date back to 1798 when the first treaty of friendship was concluded between the Sultan of Muscat and the British Government of India. British interests in Oman were predicated on Whitehall's concern with the defence of India and the imperatives of maintaining secure trade routes and containing the expansion of other European powers in the Indian Ocean. Thus the first British naval and military inputs into Oman were tied up with the security of the East India Company and of British rule in India. Following the discovery of the potential for using oil as fuel, and later the conversion of the British naval fleet from coal-fired ships to oil-fired ships in 1911, the security of tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz gained increasing importance. Royal Air Force air power was widely used throughout the region in the aftermath of the First World War, peacekeeping in Iraq, Trans-Jordan and on the North West frontier as well as surveillance of the Gulf coastal regions. In support of this a series of relief landing grounds was established around the

coasts of Oman including Salalah, Dukm, Ras Al Hadd, Seeb and in the Musandam (Khasab) in the north. We were also protecting and proving air transport links across Arabia and the Far East and, of course, the Royal Air Force had staging and diplomatic telecommunications facilities on the island of Masirah from the 1930s until we pulled out in 1977.

In the wake of the 1956 Suez debacle it was becoming more and more evident that British influence in the Middle East was weakening. Dissident groups were becoming increasingly strident and Oman, although a remote and largely unknown country, was not immune from these emerging troubles. Air Vice-Marshal Peter Dye's excellent recent exposition on the events of the Jebel Akhdar War for this Society (*see Journal 48*) illustrated very graphically the role that air power played in the suppression of various revolts against the Sultan. However, although most of the ground troops involved were under the command of British Officers seconded to the Sultan, all of the air assets used in support of the Sultan's Armed forces were from RAF units operating from Cyprus, Aden or Sharjah. As Peter pointed out, it was not until after the visit to Oman in 1958 by the Under-Secretary of State for War – Julian Amery – that agreements were made to address the possible wider consequences of tribal and externally inspired insurgencies. In the following year, during a visit to London by the then Sultan of Oman, it was agreed to provide the Sultans' Armed Forces with much greater fighting capacity including the establishment of an air element manned by pilots seconded from the RAF.

The Early Days

The Sultan of Muscat and Oman's Air Force (SMOAF) was created on 1 March 1959 under the command of Squadron Leader G Barry Atkinson; the initial fleets of Hunting Percival Provost T.52s and Scottish Aviation Pioneer CC 1s were delivered during that year. The pilots, who were all secondees from the RAF, were converted to the Provosts at Manby and eventually mustered at Bait al Falaj airfield near Muscat later that year having staged via Khormaksar. Unlikely as it sounds, the Provosts entered service in the COIN role with the Pioneers being used as artillery spotters and light transports. The Pioneers proved difficult to maintain and were later replaced by



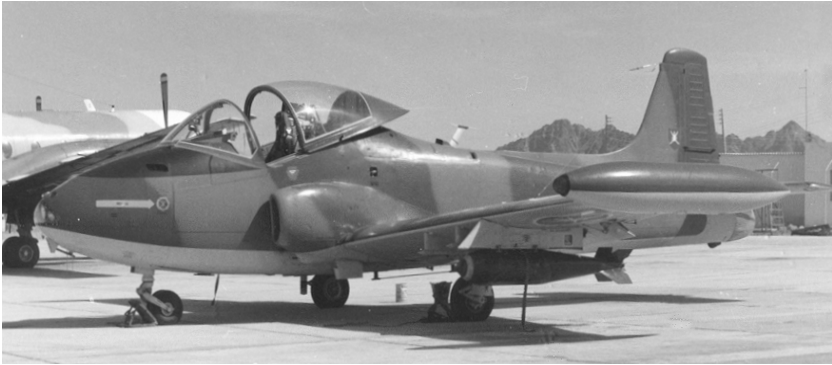
A SOAF Provost T.52 armed with 3-inch RPs. (Richard Grevatte-Ball)

Beavers, supplemented by Caribou and eventually Vickers Viscounts.

With the Jebel Akhdar insurrection resolved, the Northern part of the Country was relatively peaceful, with infrastructure and industry being developed but this served only to fuel further the discontent in the south where the Jebali considered themselves ignored and neglected. Salalah was the main town and to ensure the regular supply of support to the garrison the airfield was developed and, under the command of the RAF, became a key installation for the conduct of operations against the rebels.

In August 1970, by which time it had embraced the jet age, the force was renamed to become the Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF). Its assets were split between Bait al Falaj, near the capital, Muscat, in the north of the country and at RAF Salalah in Dhofar in the south. SOAF consisted of four squadrons: No 1 Sqn had approximately sixteen BAC Strikemasters and four DH Canada Beavers; No 2 Sqn had ten Short Skyvans and two DH Canada Caribou; No 3 Sqn had fourteen Agusta-Bell 205s and 206s, and No 4 Sqn had three Vickers Viscounts, which spent most of their time shuttling between Salalah and Muscat.

The Dhofar Campaign, as the rebellion in the southern region of the Oman became known, ground on for a further five years or more – and for a fuller eyewitness description I would refer you to the following presentation by Denis Grey. Suffice to say here that, after a sustained effort by the ground forces, supported by an equally



Mainstay of the SOAF during the Dhofar campaign, the Strikemaster.

dedicated air campaign, the dissident Omani rebels began losing heart and the general populace was won over by the ‘hearts and minds’ campaign conducted by the new Sultan. Events began to turn in favour of the Sultan’s forces and civil control was eventually restored. There was, however, still a very real threat presented by the PDRY with strong Soviet backed, equipped and trained forces. The SOAF needed more punch and in 1975 it was a gift of Hunters from Jordan which signalled a change in fortunes. Again, RAF Loan Service pilots were very much in evidence providing much needed fast jet DFGA experience.

Re-shaping the SOAF – ‘Omanisation’

With the war now receding fast the Commander of the SOAF (initially Group Captain [later Air Marshal] Les Phipps and subsequently Group Captain [later Air Marshal] Erik Bennett) was charged with modernising, training and re-organising the air force with the aim of putting Omanis in the driving seat – ‘Omanisation’. The traditional task of Loan Service began to change from manning the front line to more of a training, mentoring and standardisation role. Airwork engineers continued to service the aircraft but RAF Loan Service ground crews and engineering officers were brought in to advise on, and set up, training schemes covering basic and advanced trade training.

On the flying side, with the Hunter taking the lion’s share of the tactical flying and operating from the newly commissioned base at Thumrait, the Strikemasters were relocated to Masirah (now in Omani



A SOAF Rapier.

hands) where a full blown FTS was set up. The RAF was now asked to provide QFIs and, together with the existing contract pilots, they were tasked with training Omanis. By the end of 1978 there were eleven Omani pilots in service and there has been a steady output since then. However, with the introduction of the Jaguar and the expansion of the helicopter and transport fleets the demand for pilots exceeded supply. Hence the call for more Loan Service, which the RAF could not fully meet – partly on availability grounds, since volunteers to serve for up to two years unaccompanied were not exactly arriving in droves – and partly on cost grounds. The RAF could not afford to run light and the overall loan service budget was becoming increasingly stretched. The shortfall in personnel was often made up from recently retired RAF and RN aircrew, supplemented by others from, for instance, the South African and Rhodesian Air Forces.

In the early 1980s the advent of an integrated air defence system and the acquisition of Rapier gave rise to the need for fighter controllers and RAF Regiment specialists and thus the need for more Loan Service personnel. SOAF established an Ops Branch which encompassed both FC and ATC disciplines aiming at complete interchangeability – an admirable concept, albeit unfamiliar to RAF eyes.



The Jaguar entered service with the SOAF in 1977.

By the mid-1980s the RAF Loan Service establishment included CSOAF (an AVM), two group captains, four wing commanders and around twenty squadron leaders and below concerned with Flying, Ops, Admin, Supply and Training, plus a selection of SNCO posts dealing with admin, engineering and Rapier. Loan Service staff

assisted with the upgrading of the Air Defence system and advanced planning was in hand with a view to acquiring Tornado. They were also involved in setting up arrangements to handle the pre-positioning of war materiel for American Forces and oversaw the US-funded expansion of the operational facilities at Thumrait, Masirah, Seeb and Khasab. The Americans were a little suspicious of our involvement at first but, when it became clear that we represented the Oman Government (not HMG), their mood changed. I have to say that in some respects we also received some quizzical glances from our own embassy when we failed to recommend that the Omanis should buy everything from UK sources.

Up to the late 1980s Loan Service tours were still pegged at one-and-a-half or two years – except for certain posts – generally because of the unaccompanied status and the need to keep a turnover going such that we had access to the latest RAF operational training and tactical procedures. It was thought too that it would be less than career-enhancing to stay too long away from one's parent service. The lifestyle was not unduly harsh but there were very few amenities, especially at the remote sites, and even in the capital area there were few luxuries. SOAF married quarters were pretty basic and with no telephone, no TV and no internet we felt pretty cut off – and we worked a six-day week. True, the pay was enhanced, but we all paid



The RAFO's No 6 Sqn currently flies the single-seat Hawk 203.

UK income tax and, as is well known, LOA was based on price differentials for the same goods and services – but if you cannot get the normal range of goods and there are no amenities, like theatres and cinemas, then there is no need for LOA to be high! Nonetheless, the country was fascinating, the people friendly and courteous and the job was challenging and absorbing.

Change of Command

Omanisation proceeded apace and when AVM Erik Bennett retired in 1990, in which year the SOAF was restyled the RAFO (Royal Air Force of Oman), he was replaced by AVM Talib Meran, one of the original Omani pilots from 1978. He introduced some personnel and administrative changes which, although aimed at enhancing the lives of the Omani officers, greatly benefitted Loan Service and contract officers as well. Accompanied service was now encouraged (where appropriate facilities existed) and more flexibility was permitted on tour lengths, especially where particular skills were required and new volunteers were not readily available. The fiscal situation was adversely affected by the immediate post-Gulf War tensions and by the mid-1990s the Loan Service budget was under a great deal of pressure. Under the five-year fiscal planning cycle that Oman had adopted there was no allowance for inflation or currency fluctuation. Thus we were in an era of ever-shrinking budgets and each post had to be examined for its continued usefulness before a replacement could be sought for the current occupant. Although this made things difficult for the manning authorities, in a curious way it was a good discipline for the Omanis – they had to up their own game to try to fill the posts



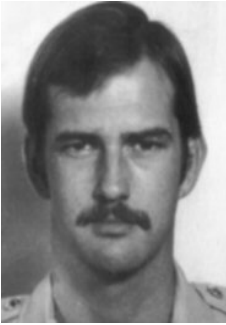
In 2005 the RAFO accepted the first of a dozen F-16s.

that Loan Service could no longer address. It was this type of situation that enabled us to persuade RAFO to consider doing the Jaguar upgrade in-country. It was planned jointly by RAFO Loan Service Ops and Engineering Staffs, with strong inputs from St Athan, the Jaguar Role Office, BAE Systems and Qinetiq and was delivered within cost and almost on time. Embodiment was done at Thumrait under joint Loan Service and Omani supervision. Clearly it was a great improvement to the Jaguar's capability, including GPS/INAS integration, revised software with digital terrain mapping, a new head-up display and an AMLCD to replace the old moving map system. As important as the enhancement of the aircraft's operational capability was the boost to the confidence of the RAFO's engineering fraternity who had proved to themselves that they could address such a high-tech upgrade, albeit with a little help from their friends.

I am glad to say that, even into this new millennium, the friendship is still as strong as ever. As an illustration – when the Royal Air Force of Oman acquired the F-16 in 2006 – although the US had offered full technical and operational assistance, and actually insisted on an American pilot serving on the new squadron, the Omanis in their turn insisted that an RAF Loan Service pilot should join the squadron as well. Although, it is interesting to note that it took the US DOD a year to approve a British pilot to fly the aircraft, in spite of his having just completed an exchange tour in the States on a similar type. It is apparent that the next re-equipment plan includes Typhoon, so some lucky guy is going to get a tour getting his knees brown in an amazing place in an amazing aircraft.

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF SERVICE WITH SOAF IN THE DHOAFAR WAR

Wg Cdr Denis Grey



Denis (Nobby) Grey joined the RAF in 1964 and subsequently flew the Victor (No 100 Sqn) Jaguar (Nos 54, 17 and 31 Sqns) and Hunter (Chivenor and Brawdy). A Jet Provosts QFI since 1969 (No 1 FTS), between 1971 and 1973 he also flew the Strikemaster and Beaver with the SOAF, logging 300+ operational sorties during the Dhofar War. He left the Service in 1985 to work for BAE Systems as a project and marketing executive; since 2006 he has run a business support consultancy.

Introduction

I had heard virtually nothing about Oman and the war in Dhofar until a couple of my flying instructor colleagues were posted there in 1970. A few months later, when my boss at RAF Linton-on-Ouse asked me whether I would be interested in a secondment to the Sultan of Oman's Air Force flying Strikemasters, I jumped at the chance. On offer was a unique operational tour at a time in the middle of the Cold War when there was no other action available for ground attack pilots.

For political reasons, the UK government saw the Dhofar War as a 'Secret War'. Although the SAS, seconded British officers from all three Services and ex-officers on contract to the Oman Forces were involved in Oman, and British lives were being lost, very few people in the UK knew about the conflict. Nevertheless, when the Omani victory eventually arrived, some five years later, it had been hard won. Defeat would almost certainly have condemned the Gulf to years of instability and anarchy. In the end, a model counter-insurgency campaign brought about a rare, unambiguous and enduring victory over Communism.¹ In retrospect, it could be argued that the campaign fought in Oman had been of potentially greater strategic significance than the concurrent Vietnam War.

This paper provides a small snapshot of one secondees' experiences during the Dhofar War.

RAF Secondees

The officer positions in SOAF were held by both RAF seconded and contracted officers. The rank of the seconded commander SOAF was squadron leader when I arrived in 1971. It was group captain when I left in 1973. Tour length averaged eighteen months to two years. Contracted officers were employed by Airwork but were otherwise integrated into the normal SOAF structure. In 1972, CSOAF's deputy, OC SOAF (Tac), was a contracted squadron leader. OC 1 Sqn (Strikemasters and Beavers) was a seconded squadron leader while OC 3 Sqn (helicopters) was a contracted squadron leader. OC SOAF(Tac) became a seconded wing commander at the same time as CSOAF became a seconded group captain in early 1973. Salalah was an RAF base and OC Salalah was a Royal Air Force squadron leader, the post later being upgraded to wing commander. The ratio of contracted to seconded officers was two to one.² In 1971, SOAF had one Omani administrative officer who was based at Salalah – Pilot Officer Malillah al Sadiqi – who went on to a sparkling and highly successful career as pilot and senior officer.

At Salalah, SOAF officers lived in the RAF Officers Mess and slept in prefabricated air-conditioned rooms surrounded by large oil drums full of sand as a defence against incoming enemy weapons. Strikemaster pilots (some of whom also flew the Beaver) could expect to fly up to two or three operational sorties each day that they were based at Salalah. We normally spent a few days every six weeks in Muscat for training and rest and recuperation.

Most of us clocked up hundreds of operational sorties during our tours but there were three particularly noteworthy events involving secondees – the actions at Habrut, Hawf and Mirbat in 1972.

Generally speaking, seconded and contracted pilots were treated the same on a day to day basis but this changed when we were tasked to carry out attacks across the border into the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen.

Habrut

In 1972, a series of contacts occurred at Habrut on the border some 120 miles north west of Salalah. Two forts faced each other across a *wadi* (dried river bed); one in Oman manned by the Dhofar Gendarmerie, the other in PDRY. A patrol from the local Omani *firqat*



Standard load for a Strikemaster was a pair of 540 lb bombs and sixteen SURA rockets but an alternative, as here, was thirty-two RPs.

(a type of local militia) attempted to cross the *wadi* in the direction of the PDRY and they sustained casualties.³ This triggered a sustained attack by the enemy on the Oman fort. Strikemasters had provided close air support and pre-planned strikes for several days beforehand against enemy troops in Oman territory – Border Crossing Authority (BCA) had not yet been granted. BCA was eventually granted on 6 May and Strikemasters flew several waves against the PDRY fort and against a variety of targets over the border including gun positions and storage areas. I flew two of these sorties with Fg Off David Milne-Smith. We shared a two-seater Strikemaster and filmed the attacks using his cine camera taking turn about.

The contemporary SAF Journal reported, ‘A few days before the Habrut incident, the 2 i/c Ho Chi Minh Unit surrendered to SAF. On 6 May, his commander was killed on the first SAOF strike on Habrut.’⁴

The Strikemasters were armed with a standard load of 2×540 lb free fall unguided bombs, sixteen SURA rockets and 2×7.62 mm general purpose machine guns. One of the bombs was fused to explode in the air, thus covering a wider area and the second was fused to explode on impact. When approaching the target area, we split into pairs with the lead aircraft carrying out the dive attacks on the main target and the Number Two suppressing the enemy guns. The PDRY fort was sturdily built but one of our bombs hit the walls taking off one side of the main tower. We had been briefed that the SURA



Denis Grey with his Strikemaster.

rockets would be especially effective if they could be fired through the roof.

In between the air attacks, the detachment of the Dhofar Gendarmerie led by Lt Hasan Ihsan had been fighting for a day and a half to defend the fort – he was subsequently awarded the Sultan’s Gallantry Medal, the Omani equivalent of the Victoria Cross.

Hawf

Following the PDRY incursions at Habrut, the Sultan ordered SOAF to attack the enemy weapons, installations and warlike stores at Hawf, just across the border with PDRY on the coast. Following the Habrut contact, our Rules of Engagement were changed and seconded pilots were not authorised to cross the border. SAF commanders were conscious of the political implications of an RAF officer being shot down over PDRY territory.

Contract officers, led by Sqn Ldr Peter Hulme carried out a series of attacks against targets in the mountains above Hawf. Subsequent SAF analysis indicated that the PFLOAG headquarters, two stores and possibly the Front’s radio capabilities were destroyed, in addition to damage to other facilities, while the attack inflicted casualties of at least fifteen killed and ten wounded.⁵ On the second day (27 May 1972), Hulme’s aircraft was hit by a 12·7 mm Shpagin bullet. With his electrical cable cut, his radio non-operational, his main fuel pipe ruptured, and fuel vapour pouring into his cockpit making it difficult to see or breathe, Hulme would have been perfectly justified in abandoning his badly damaged aircraft. However, risking imminent fire and explosion, he stayed with it and successfully brought it home. He was awarded the Sultan’s Gallantry Medal.

The SAF Journal reported, ‘As soon as the first air strike was carried out at Habrut, the PDRY government lodged a protest to the



A Strikemaster releasing a single SURA rocket.

UN. Not so after the far more devastating Hawf strike. The silence of Radio Aden on the subject was remarkable and one must hope that their government was suitably disenchanted with the mad dog rebels who had taken control of their 6th Governate.’⁶

Mirbat

Much has been written about the battle of Mirbat which took place on 19 July 1972. Furthermore, one of the Mirbat Strikemaster pilots, Flt Lt Sean Creak (a contracted pilot), was interviewed for a TV programme some years ago and UK Channel Five broadcast a programme in October 2008 entitled ‘SAS Heroes – Last Stand in Oman’ which covered the battle from the perspective of the SAS.⁷ However, little else has been published on the battle from the Strikemaster pilots’ perspective.

After a series of setbacks, the enemy decided to launch a major dramatic attack against government forces. They chose the coastal town of Mirbat some 40 miles east of Salalah airfield. The town was defended by nine members of B Sqn, 22 SAS Regiment led by Capt Mike Kealy, the local *firqat* and about twenty-five Dhofar Gendarmerie soldiers.⁸ The SAS in Oman were known as the British Army Training Team (BATT).

Between 200 and 250 enemy gathered in the hills to the north of the town with the aim of isolating and encircling it for a few hours, killing local town and tribal leaders and departing back into the hills. They originally planned to attack in the dark at 0300 hours under cover of the *khareef* (low cloud and fog). The adverse weather was to



The Dhofar Gendarmerie fort which was the focus of the action at Mirbat. There is a 25-pounder gun pit out of sight behind the fort; the enemy had a 12.7mm Shpagin heavy machine gun sited on the Jebel Ali – the dark hill to the right.

help them later that morning but during the night a thunderstorm on the mountain delayed the enemy's descent and the first exchanges occurred around the Jebel Ali soon after 0500 hours.

Back at Salalah, as was standard procedure, two armed and fuelled Strikemasters were on standby to scramble. The two pilots on standby, Flt Lts Sean Creak and David Milne-Smith, had been alerted and were listening to developments in the SOAF (Tac) Operations Room. The small unit at Mirbat was under attack but communications were understandably patchy and the size of the enemy force was not yet known. The cloud base at Salalah was 200 to 300 ft and well below normal limits for take-off and therefore operations. However, as the situation developed, it became clear that operational judgment was required. The pilots had been briefed by the BATT that the Jebel Ali (a feature just to the north of the town) had been taken and it was probable that the enemy had installed a Russian 12.7 mm Shpagin machine gun on the summit overlooking the town. This would be a real threat. They had also been told that the contact UHF frequency was Blue SARBE⁹ (240.0 MHz).

Creak led the pair of aircraft in a close formation take off. They

woke many local residents as they turned just above the rooftops over Salalah town and set course eastwards across the sea to Mirbat.

En route they discussed weapon options. The squadron had recently carried out loft bombing trials in which the 540lb bombs were released from low level in a 30° climb, allowing the aircraft to escape the bomb debris hemisphere and also avoid flying over the target. The bombs were free fall and unguided (and therefore not very accurate) so would only be suitable for targets away from own troops (like large caves or storage areas). Clearly, loft bombing would not be suitable on the current operation so the option was quickly dismissed. Furthermore, while it is risky firing guns and rockets in very low level flight, dropping unretarded ('slick' bombs with no retard parachute) in this situation would be suicidal – the bombs would explode underneath the delivery aircraft.

On a routine sortie, Strikemasters would climb to 3000ft or so – outside small arms range – to reconnoitre the area and plan the attack. However, because of the low cloud and the obvious urgency of the situation on the ground, the pilots immediately elected to carry out level strafe and rocket attacks below the cloud. This is an extremely dangerous approach from the pilot's point of view because of the high risk of being hit by one's own ricochets.

As the pilots approached the target area, they tried to contact the BATT on Blue SARBE (UHF) without success. Milne-Smith suggested that they try an alternative, commonly used VHF frequency. Contact was established straight away with Lance Corporal Roger Cole who was located in the BATT house. Cole explained that they were under attack from several directions by numerous enemy who were descending from the mountains. Creak was now running in, seconds away from the target area, closely followed by Milne-Smith. Creak asked Cole 'How close is the enemy?' Cole replied, 'One hundred yards and closing'. Cole said it again. Creak acknowledged and immediately attacked the enemy at ultra low level as they were clambering over the barbed wire defences of the northern perimeter. The noise of the jets was deafening and, critically, the attack caused the enemy to hesitate. This was the air strike which prevented the 25-pounder gun from being overrun and in all probability the battle from being lost. After the first attack, Cole handed the SARBE radio to Corporal Bob Bennett who directed the remaining air strikes from



The damage sustained by Sqn Ldr Stoker's Strikemaster on 19 July 1972.

the roof of the BATT house.

Creak's aircraft was hit seven times on this first pass by enemy machine gun fire. With the high probability of an even greater emergency situation developing (fire, fuel leak, engine failure, hydraulic leak) Creak was forced to return to Salalah leaving Milne-Smith to continue the attacks alone. Milne-Smith managed to expend all his 16 SURA rockets and most of his gun ammunition on the enemy before landing back at Salalah after a 1 hour 15 minute sortie with, miraculously, no bullet strikes on his jet

On landing, Milne-Smith was met by the Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr Bill Stoker, and they briefed for the next sortie. Milne-Smith led Stoker back to the battle at around 0915 hours.¹⁰ The cloud base had improved only slightly, so, again, no bombs were dropped. In fact, no bombs were dropped on any these sorties, contrary to some published eye-witness reports which, in the heat of the action, probably confused the rocket explosions with bombs.

The two pilots arrived in the area and set up a race track pattern, turning right after individual weapons release. With calls of 'inbound' and 'outbound', they managed to avoid a mid-air collision.

After their third or fourth pass firing rockets and guns, Stoker's aircraft was hit badly and began losing fuel rapidly from his wing tank. He steered west towards Salalah above the cloud. Milne-Smith carried out a visual inspection and flew in formation with Stoker throughout the recovery and the subsequent precautionary forced landing pattern (ie with the engine fully throttled back). They emerged from cloud at only 800ft and Stoker landed without further damage. Miraculously, Milne-Smith's aircraft had once again escaped being hit by any bullets.

Meanwhile, the SOAF helicopters had been involved from about 0730hrs in evacuating casualties. At around 1030hrs the first SOAF helicopters arrived on the beaches to the south of Mirbat to land twenty-three fully armed BATT from G Sqn to clear the remainder of the enemy and to collect the wounded. The helicopters, led by Sqn Ldr Neville Baker, were involved in several heroic incidents that day.

Soon afterwards, when the majority of the fighting was over, I was tasked to provide Strikemaster top cover in support of the mopping up operations as the surviving enemy withdrew into the mountains. By this time, the cloud was lifting and breaking and I vividly recall the devastation in the area of the fort and how black was the terrain out to 100 metres as a result of enemy mortar strikes.

Three years after the event, the UK government awarded Captain Mike Kealy the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership in this action, Corporal Bob Bennett the Military Medal and Trooper Sekonaia Takavesi the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Staff Sergeant Talaiasi Labalaba was Mentioned in Despatches, although many thought he deserved the Victoria Cross. An Omani artilleryman, Waled Khamis was awarded the Oman Gallantry Medal, the Omani VC equivalent, and Squadron Leaders Stoker and Baker were awarded the Omani Distinguished Service Medal for Gallantry, an equivalent to the DFC.

Notes:

¹ Gardiner, Ian: *In the Service of the Sultan* (Pen and Sword, Barnsley, 2006), p1.

² SAF Journal, Issue 8, 1971, p18.

³ Peterson, J E; *Oman's Insurgencies* (Saqi Books, London, 2007), p291.

⁴ SAF Journal, Issue 10, 1972, p6.

⁵ Peterson, *op cit*, p292.

⁶ SAF Journal, Issue 10, 1972. p6

⁷ At the time of writing the programme can be seen at:

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=last+stand+in+oman&aq=f

⁸ Peterson, *op cit*, p297.

⁹ Since the late 1940s the survival equipment provided for RAF aircrew has included a small radio, initially SARAH, superseded from the later 1950s by SARBE. Primarily intended as a locator beacon, transmitting on the international VHF/UHF distress frequencies (121.5 and 243.0 MHz), SARBE could also be used for two-way voice communication over short ranges – about 10 miles with early models. **Ed**

¹⁰ Peterson, *op cit*, p301.

THE RAF's ASSOCIATED OVERSEAS GROUND FIGHTING FORCES

Air Cdre M S Witherow



Commissioned into the RAF Regiment in 1956, Mickey Witherow's service included stints in Aden, the Gulf, Libya, Belize, Northern Ireland and Germany. He commanded No 26 Sqn, No 3 Wg, the Regiment Depot at Catterick and in 1963 he was the first Regiment officer to attend the RCDS; staff appointments included stints at both Ramstein and Rheindahlen, and as Director of Personnel (Ground) and Director RAF Regiment. After leaving the RAF in 1990 he joined Coutts Consulting Group, retiring as its Director of Information Technology in 2001.

INTRODUCTION

In 1994 our Society's seminar on the RAF Regiment (*Journal No 15*) included the RAF's locally-raised Associated Overseas Ground Forces, the Iraq and Aden Protectorate Levies and the RAF Regiment (Malaya). However today I propose to go a little deeper into their history and their post-war operations under RAF Regiment command.

These courageous, predominantly Moslem, forces receive scant (and sometimes pejorative) mention in published history and when recognition is occasionally given, to the Aden Protectorate Levies particularly, it usually relates to the ten years from 1957-1967 when they were controlled by the British Army.

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE LEVIES (IRAQ)

The new Kingdom of Iraq was mandated by the League of Nations to British imperial protection from 1919. Apart from its own fledgling Army and British garrison troops, Iraq had the 'Muntific Horse' a militia, raised in 1915 as a bodyguard for itinerant Ottoman Empire Magistrates and Political Officers. In 1919 this unit was reconstituted as 'The Iraq Levies' under British Army officers and NCOs. Their establishment was for 1,250 officers and men. In 1922, the Levies, with their British Army element, were assigned to the local command



A pre-war member of the Iraq Levies.

of the RAF as the ground element of the air control of Iraq. However, despite their assignment to the RAF, the Levies remained for policy purposes under the Colonial Office until 1930.

The British initially drew the Levies from the Christian-majority Assyrian population and, as in India, indigenous officers were established at an intermediate level between British officers and NCOs. Because of the somewhat anomalous, constitutional position of a protecting foreign power (not a ruling Imperial power) appointing indigenous officers within their own sovereign kingdom, in the service of the protecting monarch, the AOC Iraq was, uniquely in imperial history, designated as the Commissioning Authority for Indigenous Levy Officers. Moreover, because of their Assyrian ethnicity, the nomenclature for the officer ranks was Assyrian, as shown below.

Since they were Christians, however, the Assyrians were not fully accepted by the Iraqi nation and in 1933 it was decided that it might be politically expedient to include Kurds and Arabs; both predominantly Moslems albeit of different sects. It worked, for by becoming 'stakeholders' in their nation under the impartial command of British officers, the ethnic and religious groups established a '*modus vivendi*' akin to India's post-mutiny soldiery. Initially however, the fractious Kurds were regarded warily, only a single rifle company (approx 130 men) being authorised until the British could assess the risk. In the event, they proved to be the best warriors and most fervent loyalists of

Title	Meaning	Insignia (woven in gold fabric)	Equivalent Rank
Rab Khaila	Commander of 1,000	Four shoulder-bars	Lt Col
Rab Tremma	Commander of 500	Three shoulder-bars	Maj
Rab Emma	Commander of 100	Two shoulder-bars	Capt
Rab Khamshi	Commander of 50	One shoulder-bar	Lt

Ranks of Indigenous Iraq Levy Officers.

all, coming to accept Iraq (whilst under British protection) as their country. The British soon regarded them as the Levies' élite. During this Society's 'North Mediterranean' seminar in 2009, we learned of the Kurds' stalwart part in the Second World War, first alongside the Assyrian and Arab Levy units against Rashid Ali in 1941 and then as paratroops, fighting both the Axis and the Greek ELAS in Southern Europe.

The Force was renamed in 1942 as 'The RAF Levies (Iraq)' in recognition of their loyalty to the British Crown against the 1941 rebellion. The AOC held what he called 'The Red Eagle Parade', where he read a formal proclamation to effect the re-naming and to award the Levies 'The Red Eagle Badge of the RAF'; meaning that indigenous NCOs and men were to be privileged to wear what we know in RAF stores parlance as the 'RAF Badge, Arm, Eagle, airmen (tropical dress)'; a shrewd, near cost-free gesture, at a stroke placing the Levies psychologically on a level with the RAF.



During the war, junior officers of the RAF Regiment began to serve with the RAF Levies Iraq, a process leading to complete RAF control by 1947. The Force, commanded by an RAF Regiment group captain, had 60 British officers and NCOs and 1,900 Iraqis, formed into a HQ and two wings, each of four rifle squadrons. The Force cap-badge depicted crossed *khunjars*, the curved Levantine dagger traditionally worn by all Kurdish and Assyrian men and by many Arabs, the crossing symbolising harmony between the races, but this emblem had never been formalised. In 1949 in recognition of their new status as a wholly Royal Air Force formation, the crossed *khunjars* were enshrined as the central device of the new Royal Air Force Levies (Iraq) badge, approved by King George VI.

After the Second World War except for a serious civil riot in June 1952 at Habbaniya, when the Levies intervened effectively, Iraq was relatively calm, amid turmoil in neighbouring countries. Then, in 1954, Iraq abrogated the bi-lateral Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Protection and became, instead, the pivot of the new international Baghdad Pact,

later CENTO. British Forces withdrew and the RAF Levies (Iraq) disbanded in May 1955.

The RAF Levies (Iraq) were unique among the Associated Forces in not seeing active service whilst under RAF Regiment command, so there are neither operational awards nor operational photographs from the period. Thus, the residual image of the Force tends to be one of a sybaritic post-war life for British Officers, jackal-hunting, and playing polo. In fact the Force trained as hard as it played. The RAF Levies (Iraq), under its British Officers, were trusted by the Iraqis far more than their own military; with good cause as we have all seen since. Indeed, during both the recent Iraq wars, several RAF Regiment Officers and men reported being greeted by old and young Iraqis claiming proudly, often with evidence, to have been an Iraq Levy or the son or grandson of one.

THE ADEN PROTECTORATE LEVIES – the APL

In 1839 Aden became the first new territory to be added to Queen Victoria's domains. It was ceded by the Sultan of Lahej to the East India Company's Bombay Presidency through negotiation, for its natural harbour and remained a dependency of Bombay until 1937, when it became a British Crown Colony. However, in 1873 the Sultan sought protection from Ottoman invasion and Lahej became the first 'British Protected Territory' in South Arabia. A series of Protection Treaties followed with twenty-four of the other twenty-five autonomous tribal states lying to the south of Yemen and Saudi Arabia, stretching from west to east almost 1,000 miles to the Oman. By 1879 this constituted the Aden Protectorate under local tribal rule within the region, but under the overall aegis of the Governor of Aden. The single exception was the Upper Yafai who, in their inaccessible fastness in the north of the Protectorate, had never been conquered by, nor allied to, anyone. Only on the formation of the ill-starred Federation in the mid-1960s did they lose their independence – an interesting slant on so-called liberation from 'Imperialism'!

The new Protectorate was divided into the Western and Eastern Protectorates; (WAP and EAP respectively). The twenty-one small states, mostly in the harsh 7,000 ft mountains lying between the Colony and Yemen comprised the WAP. Isolated, insular in outlook and warlike, with a tradition of perpetual inter-tribal conflict and

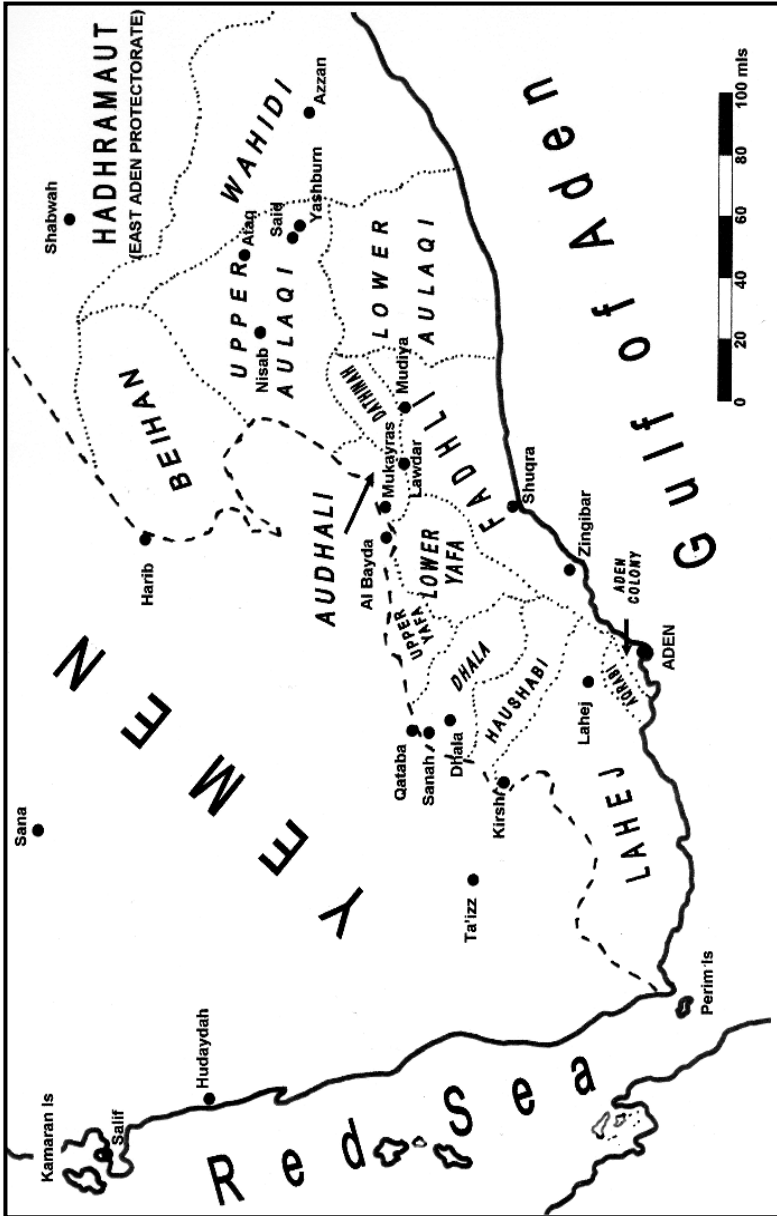


Typical WAP terrain - trucks negotiating the Dhala Pass, a favourite enemy ambush area in February 1957.

shifting alliances, these were the principal (but not exclusive) recruiting-grounds for the Levies – except for the egregious Upper Yafai, whose neighbours and kin, the Lower Yafai, were generally considered the most reliable soldiery in the APL. The WAP's tribes, mainly Sunni (Shafai Sect), also created a useful buffer between the principally Shia (Zaidi Sect) Imamate of Yemen to the north and the cosmopolitan Aden Colony, with its multifarious nationalities, races and religions.

In 1936, the renowned British Resident Harold Ingrams, brokered an enduring inter-tribal truce between the Sultan of Quaiti and the Sheikh of the Hadrami. Thereafter the four large States in the EAP became relatively stable, waxing prosperous through overseas trading. Their tribal militias and police maintained order and such border-integrity with Saudi Arabia as was possible without clearly defined borders, with only occasional calls upon the RAF to make either 'flag-waving' warning flights or APL ground forays.

The APL was established from the relics of the Yemen Light



The Western Aden Protectorate showing major tribal areas and selected settlements.



No 6 Sqn APL on a non-tactical up-country move

Infantry by the RAF in 1928 for Air Control of the Protectorates. Under the RAF it had 1,200 men with 50 British and Arab Officers, in two battalions, each of four rifle companies. A section of RAF armoured cars, imported from Iraq and assigned as a 'flight' of No 8 (Bomber) Squadron, of enduring Aden fame, added some muscle. APL Arab Officers' held Governor's Commissions and their ranks were Turkish as shown below.

Title	Insignia	Equivalent Rank
Bimbashi al Awal	Crown	Maj
Bimbashi	Three Pips	Capt
Yuzbashi	Two Pips	Lt
Mulazzim	One Pip	2nd Lt

Aden Protectorate Levies Arab Officer Ranks.

Unlike the Iraq Levies, the APL had a low-profile war, shooting down one Italian bomber with their wartime AA Battery, but otherwise maintaining the normal, fractious 'peace' in the Protectorate and neighbouring British Dependencies. Things were about to change, however.

After the war, British Army officers were progressively replaced by officers of the RAF Regiment between 1946 and 1948. The new Force of 1,347 was thereafter commanded by an RAF Regiment group captain with a British Adjutant and the Senior Arab Officer (the *bimbashi al-awal*) plus one each junior RAF Technical and Equipment Officers. The Force Commander also controlled, at Force level, the APL Hospital (commanded by a Medical Branch wing commander) and No 10 (Armoured Car) Squadron, APL.

The RAF Regiment inherited two Levy Wings, as the battalions were now called, with a third authorised, each of three rifle squadrons.



At wing level, the Wing Commander and his Adjutant were British, plus an Arab Officer, a *bimbashi*. Similarly, each rifle squadron had only two British Officers, the OC and the 2 i/c. The four junior officers, and all other ranks were Arabs. An RAF-style badge was approved for the APL, depicting crossed *ghambias*, the traditional weapon of Southern Arabia, subtly different from the Iraqi *khunjar*, in that the latter is for simple stabbing, while the broader and rather more acutely curved

ghambia blade is optimised for stabbing and then ripping in a single action!

Uniquely however, No 10 (Armoured Car) Squadron, APL, apart from being the only armoured unit organic to any of the three RAF Associated Overseas Forces, was also wholly RAF Regiment-manned. In 1955 it became the first unit in the UK Forces to be equipped with the new Ferret Mark II armoured scout car, with a .30" calibre turreted Browning machine gun. This versatile, reliable short-wheelbase vehicle with heavy-duty tyres was the first truly useful armoured car for the mountainous volcanic terrain of much of the Protectorate, as well as for operation on sand.

Unfortunately, their new Squadron Commander blotted his copybook on his first up-country foray when, en-route with his new unit of twenty-seven Ferrets to Shuqra, the tribal capital of the turbulent Fahdli to make a show of force, he lost most of them to the seashore quicksands near Zingibar, about 40 miles NE of Aden, half-



No 10 Sqn's Ferrets – night lager – WAP, 1956.

way to Shuqra, having ignored warnings about the sands. Fortunately no-one was killed but, as well as his vehicles, he lost his command, his acting rank of squadron leader and several years seniority as a flight lieutenant. I saw the turret-tops still forlornly protruding from the sands about 18 months later on my first foray to Shuqra!

However, No 10 Squadron was rapidly re-equipped and, under its replacement OC, operated thereafter with distinction, particularly in early 1957, when Flt Lt George Calvert and Sgt John Molyneux, both RAF Regiment, won an MC and an MM respectively in the same action against a strong Yemeni cross-border violation.

APL OPERATIONS

Just before the Army's handover of command of the APL to the RAF Regiment in 1948, but with a number of RAF Regiment officers already in post, an ugly incident occurred in Aden. In 1947 the Indian

Army garrison had left Aden prior to Indian independence and the residual British Army presence consisted of only a few small logistic and other specialised garrison sub-units. Then Palestine erupted, causing Arabs across the Middle East to turn on local Jews, of whom there were many in Aden. Five day's of anti-Jewish rioting in early December 1947, resulted in heavy loss of life on both sides, Jew and Arab. The reports tell of mass graves being needed, regardless of religion, for reasons of public health. Smoke and flame from massive fires in Crater City was likened to a re-awakening of the extinct volcano from which it is named. The indigenous Aden Armed Police were steady, but could not cope, so a Levy Wing was sent in to re-establish the peace, whilst an RAF Regiment Wing, with three squadrons (approx 500 men), plus two companies of infantry (approx 200 men) was summoned urgently from the Suez Canal Zone.

Unfortunately, there was no Joint Operations Centre in Aden, making it almost impossible to exert effective command over the troops trying to control the unrest in Crater, Ma'alla and Steamer Point. The 'scratch' British Force involved included APL and forty sailors from miscellaneous RN ships, all of them untrained in riot-control. Controversy remains as to whether the Levies were wholly loyal, but they were clearly ill-prepared for IS duties, because somebody ordered the firing of warning shots over the rioters, a practice that had been specifically prohibited throughout the British Empire since the Amritsar disaster of 1919. Warning shots cause an excited 'mob mind' to assume that the authorities are not serious, whilst agitators may exploit the situation, generating more fervour. As matters worsened, automatic fire was authorised; even more taboo after Amritsar. Much blood was shed over five days and the chaos worsened.

At one point the Levies were withdrawn to barracks and disarmed on suspicion of treachery, before the Levy Force Commander, a (Territorial) Col Jones appeared on the scene and persuaded the Governor to reverse the decision after half an hour. After this Wg Cdr (later AVM) Donald Pocock, who had recently formed a third Levy Wing, relieved the first unit and on its very first operation his No 3 Wg successfully contained the situation until the RAF Regiment and the infantry arrived from Egypt on the fifth day. Upon its arrival, No 20 Wing RAF Regt took control, with the infantry companies

attached, relieving the APL Wing. A highly placed British civilian eye-witness told me about this in 1961, saying that Donald Pocock's personal intervention with his Levy Wing, and the effectiveness of No 20 Wg, in the first RAF intervention in force on the ground in the Colony, had been decisive. No 20 Wg and its squadrons subsequently remained as the permanent IS garrison until 1957. Command of the APL passed to the RAF Regiment in the New Year but they were never called into the Colony again.

A book published in 2000, *The Armed Forces of Aden, 1839-1967*,¹ wrongly ascribes a 'mutiny' at Buraimi, in Oman, in 1953 to the APL, alleging that they murdered two of their own officers there. They did not. It was a wholly Trucial Oman Levies (TOL) affair. A Gulf Emirates Force, akin to the APL, but smaller and very lightly armed, the TOL was led by mercenary ex-army officers (mainly British and Jordanian). A flight of APL was sent to support the TOL against Saudi threats to Buraimi, a long-simmering dispute. The Saudis eventually backed off. However, immediately after the action, two dissident TOL soldiers who had some time previously been discharged from the APL, shot dead the British mercenary CO of the TOL and a serving RAF Medical Officer from Sharjah. Far from disgrace, Fg Off John Lee of the RAF Regiment, the only APL officer in Buraimi at the time, was Mentioned in Despatches for his action there.

However, there was a sad sequel two years later. In June 1955, Flt Lt John Lee was killed in action in the Aden Protectorate, along with Wg Cdr Rodney Marshall, CO of No 1 Wing APL, an Arab Officer and five APL soldiers, in a ferocious engagement in the Wadi Hatib, a notorious hot-spot where, over the preceding eighteen months, the Levies had taken seventeen casualties. Sqn Ldr 'Jock' Stewart, OC No 6 Sqn APL, who assumed command mid-action upon the Wing Commander's death, won an MC for his conduct of the battle. He was the father of Col Bob Stewart, DSO, of Balkans/TV/radio/book fame, now (*April 2010 - Ed*) a Conservative Parliamentary Candidate.

Far worse than the inaccurate record of the Buraimi incident, especially in light of the bloody but gallant record of the Wadi Hatib over the period 1954-55, is Sir Kennedy Trevaskis' disparaging of the RAF Regiment. A career Political Officer in Aden, and High Commissioner in the early 1960s, Trevaskis writes, in his oft-quoted

book *Shades of Amber*,² of RAF Regiment officers who ‘spoke no Arabic’ and of the ‘ill-trained, ill-equipped and ill-Officered APL’, specifically in 1954-55. According to him, the APL were a Force ‘...armed only with rifles and Bren guns and employed mainly on guard and ceremonial duties in Aden’ and writes of ‘serious disaffection’ and ‘mass desertion.....of hundreds’, from ‘an APL unit’ in 1955, whereafter, he states, ‘..... the Army then took control and re-established order’. This is distorted and quite untrue. These are the *facts* relating to the RAF Regiment’s association with the APL during the period in question:

1. Levy squadrons were equipped identically to the new RAF Regiment field squadrons in 1954, thus better armed in 1954 than infantry companies in the British Army.
2. The entire Force establishment was less than 1,400. Had ‘hundreds’ deserted, the Force would have ceased to be viable.
3. The Army had no units in the Aden Protectorate at that time.
4. *Some* British APL Officers did not speak Arabic in 1954, but from 1955 *all* RAF Regiment APL Officers attended Arabic-language training at the University of London. This was an RAF decision, not a political one, made well before 1954 but held in abeyance until the RAF Regiment’s future was assured.
5. The first two Army Officers (captains) did not arrive until late 1956 as routine replacements for tour-ex RAF Regiment APL Officers.
6. The Force transferred to the Army in April 1957. The last RAF Regiment Officers were not replaced by Army Officers until 1959.
7. Thereafter, the Army APL establishment included six RAF Regiment Officers as Company Commanders and Seconds-in-Command until ‘Arabisation’ was completed. Two were decorated for gallantry.
8. The book *Without Glory in Arabia*,³ on Sir Kennedy’s accounts of political and military matters states that ‘He....is not always consistent with the actual record...’, and that ‘...it is not now possible to reconcile these apparently different records and

interpretations.’

That said, individual desertion was always a factor of APL life, sometimes for Yemeni bribes, sometimes on account of grievance (poor pay principally), but most often because of tribal disputes or family feuds. However, desertion did not have the same connotations for a tribesman as it does for us; it almost always occurred in ones or twos, the deserters often returning voluntarily to their units, with their weapons (minus several rounds of ammunition) having settled their private scores. That is the tribal culture. Indeed, the years 1954 to 1957, during which the British and Arab Officers and men won the operational awards (there were other non-operational ones) listed at

	British	Arab
OBE	1	1
MBE	3	4
MC	4 ⁱ	4
GM	1 ⁱⁱ	
MM	1	3
BEM	2	1
MiD	2	

Table 1. Operational Awards to the APL – 1954-57

Table 1, represented probably the most successful campaigning period in the APL’s entire history. Certainly, I have not identified a British Army Regiment that won eight Military Crosses and four Military Medals anywhere during this post-Korea period.

During the same period the RAF Regiment lost a wing commander, a squadron leader and two flight lieutenants killed in action with the APL. There is no known compilation available for Arab Officers and men killed in action, although I personally knew of three Arab Officers and six or more soldiers KIA in 1956-57 alone. There were many more than this and many wounded.

However, as political change approached and political tensions rose, it was clear that ‘Air Control’ was no longer adequate in the Aden Protectorate. The intended new Federal State needed a National Army to face the growing Soviet and Egyptian-backed threat. Thus,

ⁱ An earlier RAF Regt MC had been won in 1949 under RAF command. In 1959 under Army APL command, a further MC was awarded to an RAF Regt Officer and in 1958 a Queen’s Commendation for Brave Conduct was awarded to another.

ⁱⁱ The GM was awarded to a former RAF Regt APL Officer, who, as a Political Officer in 1963, deliberately threw himself onto a grenade thrown at Trevaskis, earning a posthumous Bar to his first GM – won in the Protectorate in 1956.

when after almost ten years in command of the APL, the RAF Regiment handed over command to the British Army in 1957, heads were held high.

THE RAF REGIMENT (MALAYA)

The RAF Regiment (Malaya) was unique among the Associated Forces. Instead of being formed as 'Levies' for 'Air Control', it was created specifically as the precursor of what would become Royal Air Force (Malaya). It was not a 'Levy' Force. A UK Government memorandum of April 1947 had called for 'colonial peoples' to become more fully involved in Imperial defence. However, the British Defence Committee in SE Asia questioned the feasibility of creating modern local air forces in the short term, because of the training and technology involved. Thus, for air forces, particularly in Malaya as the most strategically and politically important remaining SE Asian imperial territory, a start should be made with indigenous troops being responsible for the defence of in-country RAF airfields, whilst an embryonic Malayan Air Force was being nurtured.

An Order in Council constituted the new force as a corps to be called the Royal Air Force Regiment (Malaya), established at 1,054 all



Gunners of No 91 (Rifle) Sqn, RAF Regt (Malaya) clear an oil palm plantation during anti-bandit operations, Selangor, Malaya, 1951.

ranks. It was to consist of 'British Subjects or British Protected Persons', to serve in Malaya and beyond. However, because of the ethnic and related political sensitivities at the time, only British and Malays ever served in the corps. All Malay Officers held The Queen's Commission and had the same ranks as the RAF. Other ranks were called 'airmen', in the (then) various 'gunner' trades. All messes were mixed, British and Malay.

Only the need for experience required the corps to be led initially by RAF Regiment Officers in the ranks of flight lieutenant to wing commander, but with the intent that it should be wholly indigenous in due course. Interestingly, whilst British Officers were trained at London University in the Malay language as an important cultural vehicle, English remained the force language at all levels, apparently at behest of the Malays. The King approved an RAF badge for the corps, depicting a pair of crossed *kris*, the emblematic Malay national dagger, surmounted by an astral crown.



However, the next year the Communist insurgency broke out and the force was soon widely engaged beyond RAF local defence during the emergency of 1948-60. At least one squadron, often more, was always on anti-terrorist operations usually of six week's duration, under British Army operational command. Low-intensity jungle warfare is characterised by weeks of unbroken patrolling without contact, interspersed with sudden, often intensely fierce, close-quarters ambush action on either side. To survive requires sustained high levels of vigilance, stealth and self-discipline, plus excellent battle-discipline, often led at very junior level. The RAF Regiment (Malaya) was good at this, gaining the decorations and awards listed at Table 2.

In the four years of peak operations in the States of Johore and Selangor, the RAF Regiment (Malaya) killed twelve enemy, wounded twelve, captured twenty-eight and discovered and destroyed over 100 enemy camps and supply dumps, for the loss of one British officer, one Malay officer and sixteen Malay gunners killed and an

	British	Malay
OBE	1	
MBE	3	4
MM	1	3 ⁱⁱⁱ
BEM	3	3 ^{iv}
MiD	33 ^v	35
CGM (Selangor)		2 ^{vi}
DCM (Negri Sembilan)		1

Table 2. Operational Awards to the RAF Regiment (Malaya) – 1948-60

air forces in neighbouring countries, three were converted to the LAA role, with 40mm Bofors L60 guns. However, all six were able to (and did) continue to function as infantry.

Following Malayan Independence in 1957, the RAF Regiment (Malaya) remained in being until the Communist insurgency was finally defeated in 1960. The highest rank attained by a Malay officer during the thirteen years of the corps' existence was squadron leader. He had been expected to command the corps as a wing commander but in 1960 the Malayan Government decided instead to disband the corps, offering other career openings to all ranks in either the Royal Malayan Air Force or the Army. Within a very few years the said squadron leader had become Chief of the new Malaysian Air Staff. Several other ex-RAF Regiment (Malaya) personnel attained air rank, while others did well in the Malaysian Army, particularly during the subsequent 'Confrontation' with Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

These three forces operated throughout huge territories yet their respective post-war establishments never exceeded 2,000 all ranks.

ⁱⁱⁱ One of these was won by the survivor of the CGM (Selangor) action – see footnote vi.

^{iv} One of these was cited for the MM but awarded a BEM.

^v One British Officer was awarded two MiDs during his time with the RAF Regt (Malaya).

^{vi} One of these was posthumous, to a Malay Officer. The other was to a (Malay) Leading Aircraftman who took command of the same Officer's patrol, the British Sergeant having been wounded.

unspecified number of British and Malays wounded.

During the Emergency, the corps consisted of a Wing HQ, a Training Depot and six rifle squadrons, but because of the growth of potentially hostile

Their armament scales never included field artillery or armour, beyond close tactical reconnaissance and close fire-support, because their ‘artillery’ was aircraft. They were organic to Air Power. The whole was an integrated and remarkably efficient air/land concept, supported logistically from RAF main bases. These indigenous RAF-led forces were remarkable. They deserve far more recognition than they have received.

Notes:

¹ Lord, Cliff and Birtles, David; *The Armed Forces of Aden – 1939-1967* (Helion, Solihull, 2000)

² Trevaskis, Sir Kennedy; *Shades of Amber* (Hutchinson, London, 1968).

³ Hinchcliffe, Peter; Ducker, John T and Holt, Maria; *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden* (Collaborative Authorship; (I B Taurus, London, 2006).

Other Sources:

Edwards, Frank; *The Gaysh – A History of the Aden Protectorate Levies 1927-61* (Helion, Solihull, 2004).

Oliver, Gp Capt K M; *Through Adversity – The History of the RAF Regiment* (Forces & Corporate Publishing, Rushden, 1997).

Tucker, Sqn Ldr N G; *In Adversity: Honours and Awards won by The RAF Regiment and its Associated Forces 1921-1995* (Jade Publishing, Oldham, 1997).

RAF Historical Society – Journal No 15 (1994).

The following personal recollections and papers:

Iraq:

Reminiscences of The RAF Levies (Iraq) (Sqn Ldr E J Gee).

The Aden Protectorate:

Reminiscences of the Trucial Oman and the Aden Protectorates (Air Cdre A B McGuire).

Reminiscences of the Aden Protectorate Levies (Sqn Ldr J H Witherow).

Reminiscences from Aden Colony and WAP, 1956-57 (Air Cdre M S Witherow).

The RAF Regiment (Malaya):

Reminiscences of the RAF Regiment (Malaya). (Flt Lt P McElligott).

Miscellaneous documents and original notes from post-action reports, courtesy of the RAF Regiment Museum at RAF Honington.

AFTERNOON Q&A

Mike Meech. We have heard something of aircrew training, but there was an international dimension to the training of groundcrew as well. During the war, for instance, Polish apprentices were trained at Halton. Post-war, just as the apprentice scheme was winding down in the early 1970s, Halton began training Saudis, Jordanians and others. How much did the RAF gain from that aspect of training?

Jefford. I'm not sure that the RAF *per se* gains a great deal from training the technicians of other nations – but a considerable advantage does accrue to UK Ltd. We sell arms to other nations and their personnel need to be trained to maintain them – and we charge them for that service.

Gp Capt Geoff Brindle. Apart from training people in the UK, it is also done overseas. In Oman, for instance, because they were operating mostly British aircraft in the early days, the manufacturers used to offer specific-to-type engineering courses, with the RAF covering more specialised trades – safety equipment, armourers, propulsion and, increasingly, avionics. As an element of loan service, the RAF helped to establish a Technical Training Institute in Oman. This had been conceived as a joint-service undertaking but it finished up being air-only, because the army couldn't grasp the similarity between the gun sights in a tank and in an aeroplane, even though both were computer-based and relied on GPS. But today, the RAF-instigated Institute provides instruction from raw recruits to junior command/SNCO level.

AVM George Black. I'm a member of the Mess at Halton and I still see foreign students passing through, still in significant numbers but, I think for relatively short courses nowadays, so it is still going on, but on a very commercial basis. They clearly benefit from the training provided by the RAF but the real beneficiaries are, I think, the government and industry.

Sir Peter Squire. An observation, rather than a question, relating to the issues raised by Tom and Jeff. Something that I have lamented for some years is that, while some relationships remain strong, there has been a reduction in the RAF's interaction with other air forces around the world. This partly due to the contraction of the Exam Wing's

activities and the reduction in the amount of flying training of foreign students that we undertake today. The key to maintaining influence is to train aircrew in the first place, because that leads to follow-on links in the form of standardisation checks, exchange tours and the like. Sadly, while we gained from this significantly in the past, we have been priced out of the market by the Treasury who have, in recent years, demanded payment in full – at a rate which many nations simply cannot afford. I recall that, when I was a QFI on Hunters at No 4 FTS, at Valley, in the early 1970s we were training Ecuadoreans, Kuwaitis, Jordanians, Malaysians, Singaporeans and Saudis. Having established those links, we were in those days able to build on that to establish long-term relationships. I think that, if we were able to persuade the Treasury to back down on the full-cost the political influence gained would outweigh the loss in revenue.

Gp Capt Tom Eeles. If I could just pick-up on that. I fly with the Air Experience Flight at Wyton which gives me some insight into the current flying training system and there has been a regular, if small, stream of Iraqi and Kuwaiti aircrew passing through, destined specifically for multi-engined training at Cranwell, so the stream hasn't completely dried up, although it is a lot smaller than it used to be.

AVM Black. I would underline Sir Peter's point about funding. We had a tremendous fight with the Treasury to get the Saudis into Coningsby. The initial price was simply prohibitive and, quite understandably, the Saudis declined to pay it. It required negotiation at the very highest, Prime Ministerial, level to get that sorted out. That is a sad reflection on the way that we try to do business; it is not sensible to charge twice what you need to charge – and there is much to lose. In the later 1960s I was personally involved in training Saudi pilots on the Lightning, at Coltishall. One of those pilots is now the CinC of the Royal Saudi Air Force and he is convinced the Saudi connection with the RAF was a critical factor in the growth of his air force.

Jefford. Defence sales is clearly a critical element in the equation. When we were able to sell Hunters and Canberras around the world in the 1950s and '60s, it automatically created a substantial requirement for training. Today, with foreign air forces tending to opt for F-16s,

the training spin-off goes elsewhere.

Richard Lambert. Going back to the WW II training arrangements – did these include the Fleet Air Arm or was the Navy quite separate?

Jefford. It was essentially a joint affair, certainly in North America. Within the Canadian system, naval pilots were trained alongside those of the RAF and the figures in the table that I showed you embraced both, although there was an exclusively Naval Air Gunners School at Yarmouth, NS. In the United States, the Towers Scheme was primarily concerned with FAA pilots, although it did train flying boat pilots for the RAF as well.¹

Richard Bateson. Could anyone say anything about the re-training of former *Luftwaffe* pilots in the late 1950s – and, more recently, there has been no mention of the Tornado Tri-Service Training Establishment at Cottesmore.

Jefford. True, because time constraints meant that I had to confine my pitch to basic flying training – taking recruits off the streets and turning them into pilots, or other categories of aircrew. That wasn't the case with already-badged Tornado crews who were converting to type, nor to the training of ex-Messerschmitt pilots, some of them with 200 victories to their credit, who were merely in need of a refresher course. The RAF did handle some of that but not the *ab initio* training of pilots for the new *Luftwaffe*; they would probably have been trained under the early post-war NATO scheme in Canada or in the USA.

Brindle. We certainly did some refresher flying. I recall an anecdote told by a colleague who had been a gunnery instructor with one of the Sabre wings in Germany. He said that a German pilot he was flying with began to draw a bead on the Mosquito target-tug at which point Joe took over and remonstrated with him. The German apologised, explaining that it was force of habit!

Eeles. When I was Station Commander at Linton-on-Ouse in the early '90s we were still training German Navy pilots. Because the Germans were flying the same helicopters as the Fleet Air Arm, the

¹ The figures tabulated for notionally RAF pilots and air gunners trained in Canada actually include 3,088 naval pilots and 704 gunners. The Towers Scheme produced 2,081 pilots for the FAA and 1,784 for the RAF. **Ed**

Lynx and the Sea King, they were going through the Royal Navy's system – from scratch right through to operational conversion. It used to give me great pleasure to ensure that the German students took part in the annual Battle of Britain march past in York . . .

Jefford. There's that link with defence sales again. If you can sell them the kit, you get to train them, and you gain a lot of incidental influence over a long period. It feels a little uncomfortable to be promoting the arms trade but the fact is that it is profitable – and good for the RAF.

CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

AVM George Black

Ladies and Gentlemen. I hope that you have found today interesting. I would like to thank, on your behalf, all of the speakers who have given us a very full account of various aspects training and even of ground operations in Aden and elsewhere. I am not going to attempt to sum up in any detail, other than to note that our discussion has stressed the value of the RAF to other air forces. I have seen it first-hand throughout my Service career and I have seen it since then through industry. There is no doubt the training provided by the Royal Air Force, from the earliest days, is and always has been held in very high regard, and I hope that that will continue to be the case.

FEEDBACK

I don't often carry Feedback, but I think that this may be of some interest. In *Journal 48* (p49) Mike Dudgeon referred to a pair of antique field guns that were recovered from outside the AHQ at Habbaniya, refurbished and restored to use during the siege in 1941.¹ Air Mshl Macfadyen picked up on this (p58), noting that the guns eventually found their way to Cyprus where they still were in 1998, although their precise present whereabouts are uncertain.

AVM Sandy Hunter has submitted the accompanying pictures of the guns 'guarding' the HQ at Episkopi. Assuming that they really are the ex-Hab guns, it is surmised that, having been retired from active service for a second time, ownership will have remained with AHQ Iraq until it became AHQ Levant in May 1955. In January 1956 AHQ Levant moved from Habbaniya to Nicosia where it set up shop alongside HQ MEAF which had arrived from Egypt in 1954. In May 1957 HQ MEAF moved to Episkopi and, if it had not already acquired the guns by 'pulling rank', will doubtless have inherited them when AHQ Levant closed down in 1958. **Ed**



¹ On page 117 of *The War That Never Was* (Airlife, Shrewsbury, 1991), Mike's father, Tony Dudgeon, actually says that the guns had been outside 'the Officers Mess' – but, if that was the case, which Officers Mess?; there were several.



Plates identifying the guns as 2.75 inch Breach Loaders, believed to be 'screw guns', ie having a barrel that could be broken into two parts to make it more portable in mountain terrain.



BOOK REVIEWS

Aircraft of the Third Reich, Volume One by William Green. Aerospace Master Books; 2010. £60.

William Green was one of the most authoritative and prolific aviation writers of the 1960s and '70s with a string of editorships and titles to his credit. Of these, many would regard his quite remarkable *Warplanes of the Third Reich* as his major achievement. As its title indicates, it described, in considerable detail, every combat aircraft flown by Germany between 1933 and 1945, including those which failed to progress beyond the prototype stage. There were general arrangement drawings of each type, and of every major variant, and the 672 A4 pages were lavishly illustrated with photographs, tone drawings and cutaways. In 1970, this book was quite astonishing and it really did appear to merit that much overused adjective – 'definitive'.

Sadly, William Green passed away in January 2010 but, a few months later the first of, eventually, three volumes of a revised edition of his master work was published. Volume One alone runs to 508 pages, which suggests that the original must have been deeply flawed, but that is not the case. While Green is still credited as the author, the change in the title indicates that the net has been spread wider. This reflects the fact that a number of other writers have made contributions so that the book, with its expanded scope, now embraces any aeroplane that wore a *Hakenkreuz*, notably the trainers that were previously excluded. So in Vol 1, which covers manufacturers between A and F, we have, in addition to the home grown Arados, Dorniers and Focke-Wulfs, pictures of captured aeroplanes like the B-17, B-24, Blenheim and Beaufighter, along with the French Breguet 521 and Dewoitine 520 and sundry Italian CANTs and Fiats, all sporting swastikas. All of the original general arrangement drawings have been reproduced and there are even more cutaways and tone drawings, some of the latter now in colour. And all of this has been printed on coated paper.

So what about that 'definitive'? Was it misplaced in 1970? No. Apart from the additional content, and thus extra pages, arising from the new catch-all title, the original text has been reproduced pretty much verbatim – so Green really did get it right forty years ago. That

said, a forensic examination does reveal one or two updates. For instance, while the first edition listed only sixteen *Rüstätze* applicable to the Do 217; this list now runs to twenty-five, omitting only the R18.

Do I have any reservations? Only two. While a mere photograph suffices for the 'foreign' types that have been included, I think we have been a little short-changed by not being provided with general arrangement drawings of the German aeroplanes that have been added, particularly the trainers built by Arado and Bücker. Secondly, I think that the editor(s) took their eye of the ball while the designers were laying out the book, so we have most of the cutaways spread across two pages, creating a staple-in-the-navel effect, with important bits disappearing into the gutter; much better to have rotated them through 90° and reproduced them full-page landscaped. On the other hand, the text has been printed in a slightly larger point size, which makes the layout rather less cramped and easier to read, which will also have contributed to the increased page count.

And so to the big question – bearing in mind the rather eye-watering asking price – is it worth it? There is something peculiarly attractive about the products of the wartime German aviation industry. Apart from the iconic mainstream Bf 109s, Fw 190s, Ju 87s and the like, there were all those quite remarkable jets. If, like me, you are fascinated by this stuff, then this book will provide you with a comprehensive work of reference and hours of contented browsing. But what of that price? When I invested in a first edition of this 'must have' book back in 1970, it cost me £10. For the 30-year old aircrew flight lieutenant that I was at the time, that represented about one-and a half day's gross pay and one had to have an extremely understanding wife to be permitted to blow that amount of the weekly housekeeping on a mere indulgence. I was fortunate enough to have one of those. Today, even allowing for the discounts to be gained by buying direct from the publisher, the three volumes (Vols II and III are not yet available) are going to set you back a total of £162. But that is only *one* day's pay for the equivalent flight lieutenant in 2010 so, despite the rather startling headline figure, in real terms, the new version is actually significantly cheaper than the original and, since it is also substantially larger, you get even more value per pound – even if you do need 162 of them.

CGJ

Churchill's Navigator by Air Cdre John Mitchell (with Sean Feast). Pen and Sword, 2010. £20.

There is a growing trend in the aviation book business for writers to take the memoirs of an aviator and to edit and 'improve' them to produce a book for publication, in this case, a 216-page hardback. I have no problem with that in principle, but if one is going to embellish the original manuscript, one must be very familiar with air force lore. In this case there is quite a lot of duff gen and, with joint authorship, one cannot be sure who introduced it.

To make my point, I will cite just a few examples. On page 5 we are told that circumstances conspired to deprive Mitchell, then an RAFVR LAC trainee observer, of the opportunity to attend a pre-war Initial Training Wing. This was never an option, of course, as the first ITW was not formed until 15 September 1939. On page 6 the author (but which one?) states, categorically, that, on the outbreak of war, the VR was 'mobilised' and not 'called up'. That was not actually the case. Conscripts were 'called up'; reservists were 'called out' while the Auxiliary Air Force was 'embodied'; 'mobilisation' is a term applicable to units, not people. G-AFZR was not a 'code' (page 8); it was a civil aircraft registration. On page 22 we are told that 'the danger of operations in these early stages of the war cannot be understated'. Really? I think that they can. On page 32 we have Portal, as AOCinC Bomber Command in August 1940, ranked as an air chief marshal – he did not get his fourth star until he became CAS in October. On page 51 the EATS is described as a 'scheme that had been well constructed and well planned before the outbreak of war', whereas it was not even a formal proposal until October 1939 and work did not start until 1940. On page 70 we are told that HM King Georg VI's cover name was General Lion – it was Lyon. On page 103 there are references to the American 7th Air Force in Italy. This should probably have read 12th Air Force – the 7th was based on Hawaii. On page 155 the Sqn Ldr Alan Frank of 1949 is said, to have eventually become AOC 5 Gp. This is quite inexplicable, as 5 Group had disbanded four years earlier and never reformed, and, while Frank did become an AVM and SASO Support Command, he was never an AOC. There are more, but these alone suffice to create a sense of insecurity.

So, my reservations aside, what of the story itself? Mitchell's

career had a notable start, as he was one of the first of the new breed of commissioned observers. He flew a tour on Whitleys with No 58 Sqn in 1940-41 before being sent to Canada to attend the 'Spec N' Course. After a few months at the Air Ministry, he joined No 24 Sqn in 1943 to become the navigator in a hand-picked crew that was to fly VVIPs in, first a York and later a C-54 Skymaster, for the remainder of the war. The list of passengers is headed by the King and the PM and tails off with lesser fry like mere Commanders-in-Chief and sundry Cabinet Ministers. The destinations included such exotic locations as Algiers, Tehran, Adana, Marrakesh, Saki, Cairo, Montreal, Athens and Moscow (twice). This section of the book, with its observations on some of the personalities involved, is of particular interest.

After the war Mitchell stayed in uniform and, after an early stint in Washington, he spent 1947-51 in a series of navigational appointments at Marham, Cranwell and Manby. These were followed by tours at the Ministry (Operational Requirements) and the RAE before a switch to diplomacy and intelligence with postings to the Cabinet Office, Cyprus and, by now an air commodore, as Air Attaché in Moscow, with his final appointment being back at the MOD with the Defence Intelligence Staff.

So, is it good, bad or indifferent? It is good. It's a shame about the wobbly bits, but these are more prevalent in the first sixty pages or so, and once the story reaches the VIP-flying stage there are relatively few double-takes. I have no hesitation in recommending this one, and not just for navs.

CGJ

Diary of a Bomb Aimer by Campbell Muirhead (and Philip Swan). Pen and Sword, 2010. £19.99.

This is another adapted personal memoir; in this case two wartime diaries written by Campbell Muirhead. He died in 1993 so they have been 'edited and annotated' for publication by Philip Swan. The first runs from February 1942 to August 1943 and covers Muirhead's training in North America, an unsuccessful attempt to become a pilot in Arizona followed by a transfer to Canada where he qualified as an air bomber and was retained for a period as an instructor. The second covers an eleven-week/thirty-sortie tour on Lancasters with No 12 Sqn

in the summer of 1944.

It is a very curious book, which left me wondering just how much of the text was actually written by Muirhead, as distinct from that which has been contributed by Swan. This is particularly true of the second, and much larger, section. Muirhead evidently recorded the basic details of his operational flights (date, target, bomb load, take off time, duration, height) in a note book along with comments under the headings of Flak, Searchlights and Enemy Aircraft, with a final remark or two conveying an overall impression of the sortie. These notes are all reproduced, embedded within the narrative of the 'diary', supported by a photograph of the page of the original note book recording the sortie flown on 25/26 July. Unfortunately, the comments in the photograph do not match those in the 'diary' – which must raise doubts about the fidelity of all of the other entries.

There are other reasons for questioning the extent to which the original text has been 'edited'. Since the diaries were never intended to be seen by anyone else (as stated on p190) why do they contain so many entries in which Muirhead explains *to himself* things that he already knows? Why, for instance, would a member of any crew feel it necessary to write, in a personal diary, 'the WOP (Sgt Dunn)'? After flying twenty-seven sorties together, his name must surely have been pretty familiar. And why write 'an RDF station (later to be called radar)' and 'my Form 1250 (my RAF identity card)' and 'the Big City (which is what Berlin is called)' and 'Butch' (that's Air Marshall Sir Arthur Harris)? There are more of these, but why all this didacticism? Who is Muirhead informing? And I would have hoped that any RAF officer, even a VR, to have known that there is only one '1' in marshal – and that 'SWO' stood for Station, not Senior, Warrant Officer.

There are 'problems' with the content of the diaries too. On 1 April 1944 *The Times* reported that, from a force of 'nearer 1,000 than 900', Bomber Command had lost 94 aircraft during a raid on Nuremberg on 30/31 March. Two weeks later *Flight* magazine also reported the losses, but on the wrong date (29/30 March) and without hazarding a guess as to the size of the raid. This was five weeks before Muirhead had even joined an operational squadron, yet by 3 June he knew that the force despatched had actually numbered 795 aircraft and even the numbers engaged on clandestine supply-dropping sorties in support of the Resistance that same night, although he (or was it Swan?)

misspelled the target as Nuremburg – twice. Would a junior flying officer on his first tour, really have had access to such precise information and, since it was surely classified, would he have recorded it in a diary? This was not the only occasion on which Muirhead comments on raids in, what seems to me to have been, surprising detail. The sort of statistical data to which he appears to have had privileged access did not begin to become public knowledge until the 1960s.

While Muirhead appears to have been unusually well-informed in some respects, he is remarkably ill-informed in others. For instance, his belief that a Squadron Commander ‘is not allowed to come on any op, no matter how comparatively safe it may sound’ was quite without foundation. Furthermore, it says little for his powers of observation that No 12 Sqn’s ORB records that his own CO, Wg Cdr John Nelson,¹ flew seven operations during the time that Muirhead spent with the squadron, and on six of those occasions both crews actually participated in the same mission!

These anomalies aside, the writings of this very junior officer reflect a most curious mindset. He devotes a substantial amount of space to inconsequential anecdotes and the pursuit of shallow youthful occupations, like high jinks in the Mess and drinking, not sparing to use the ‘f’ word, which is in marked contrast to his remarkable perceptiveness. For example, how many other 22-year-olds had studied the *Luftwaffe* in sufficient depth to have been able to conclude that one of its major deficiencies was the inadequacy of its strategic bomber force? Post-war analysts would eventually endorse this conclusion, of course, but Muirhead had seen the light before the end of July 1944. This early date is all the more remarkable in the light of Operation *Steinbock* – the five month ‘Baby Blitz’ aimed primarily at London, a strategic bombing offensive that the Germans had terminated as recently as May.

Muirhead also seems to have had the gift of foresight. What was perhaps the most remarkable example of his prescience occurred at the end of his tour, in August 1944, when he claims that Wg Cdr Nelson

¹ The evidence of the ORB aside, there is a photograph of Wg Cdr Nelson and his crew in Tim Mason’s history of No 12 Sqn (*Leads the Field*; Lincoln, 1960). Why would a non-operational CO have a crew?

advised him that Tiger Force was being set up to attack Japan and offered him the opportunity to join it. That was about a year before the Force actually began to be created and a full nine months before the name was even introduced.²

I do not doubt that the diaries exist, in some form, but I suspect that they have been substantially embellished before they appeared in print. Without sight of the original manuscript, of course, one can only offer an opinion on the evidence as it is presented and mine is that this 200-page hardback probably owes a lot more to Swan than it does to Muirhead. Because I harbour reservations over its authenticity, I hesitate to recommend it as a positive contribution to the recording of RAF history.

CGJ

My Golden Flying Years by Air Commodore D’Arcy Greig (edited and annotated by Norman Franks and Simon Muggleton. Grub Street, 2010. £20.

Yet another memoir of an old aviator. In this case Air Cdre D’Arcy Greig whose account is confined to his experiences as a junior officer in the 1920s with a preamble to cover his brief, if remarkable, service during WW I – in September 1918, flying an FE2b of No 83 Sqn on only his third night bombing sortie, he was forced to land behind enemy lines and successfully evaded capture.

Greig died in 1986 but he has had the benefit of two editors, although they appear to have made their contributions without reference to each other, resulting in a lack of co-ordination and some duplication. For instance, Muggleton reproduces the citation for Greig’s AFC on page 5 and Franks does it again on page 225. Muggleton’s Introduction includes a summary of Greig’s later career, as does Franks’ Epilogue and it is notable that the former’s contribution exposes his unfamiliarity with air force organisation. There are also problems with the captions to one or two of the pictures

² TNA AIR10/3931. Secret Organisation Memorandum 1086/1945 directed that the ‘Nucleus Planning Staff – VLR Force’ was to be redesignated as ‘Nucleus Planning Staff – Tiger Force’ with effect from 3 May 1945. This introduced the name, although HQ Tiger Force was not actually established until 9 July and it was only then, when specific units began to be earmarked for deployment to the Pacific, that serious ‘recruiting’ started.



No 6 Sqn's original badge on the side of a Bristol Fighter in 1921.

in the standard Grub Street-style insert – notably a photograph of a DH 53 Humming Bird which is identified, quite inexplicably, as a (non-existent) ‘Grebe II monoplane’. On the other hand, the dust jacket is graced with a splendid picture of the original version of No 6 Sqn’s badge. Designed and painted by Cpl Burfield, it featured an albatross, pre-dating the later ‘bird’ sitting within the figure six and the eventual eagle as approved by the College of Heralds. Who knew?!

Compared to the book reviewed above, the saving grace in this case is that it is quite plain to see the fault lines, as the Introduction and Epilogue were clearly contributed by the co-authors and the dozen or so interjections that occur within the narrative are all in parentheses and attributed to ‘Ed’. Beyond that the other additional information, undoubtedly the work of the estimable Norman Franks, is in the form of brief biographical details relating to the many personalities who passed through Greig’s orbit. Whether these add anything to the subject’s story is a matter of opinion, but they do not disrupt the flow; you can take them or leave them, as they are provided as endnotes to each chapter – which is the right way to do it.

So much for the presentation, what of the content? I loved it. Greig spent three years flying Bristol Fighters with No 6 Sqn in Mesopotamia and a year with No 24 Sqn before becoming a QFI and being retained on the staff of CFS 1924-27. After a year at HQ Fighting Area he spent 1928-29 in charge of the High Speed Flight Experimental Section during which he just failed to set a world speed record (he beat the previous figure, but by not quite enough to count) and flew an S.5 in the 1929 Schneider Trophy Race and there the tale ends (apart from Norman Franks’ postscript which sketches in the next fifteen years or so).

The main narrative appears to be entirely in Greig’s own words, and what entertaining words they are. This was the era of carefree young pilots kept only loosely in check by the decorated combat veterans of WW I and supervised by senior officers who, it seems, could be surprisingly tolerant of crimes and misdemeanours. For

instance, Greig tells of spectacularly, embarrassingly and very publicly, destroying a Moth in a poorly executed falling leaf at a flying display at Andover in 1926. Gp Capt Wilfrid Freeman was 'sympathetic, but pained at the side having been let down' whereas Air Cdre 'Topsy' Holt though it 'the funniest thing I have ever seen. If I can get you another Moth, will you go and do it again?' There are many amusing anecdotes like this, all totally believable and many of them attributable to Greig's fully justified reputation as a practical joker – which often involved pyrotechnics.

This was the 'flying club' air force of the 1920s, of course, when, since it numbered only about 35,000 uniformed personnel, one tended to know quite a lot of those who were engaged in the same trade. Thus Greig career path tends to cross those of others and names like Robb, Sorley, the Atcherleys, Rice, Boothman, Bowen-Buscarlet, Collishaw and many others just keep cropping up. Most of them became very senior officers, but Greig is not name-dropping; they were simply his contemporaries. By 2015 the RAF is expected to be even smaller than it was in 1925, so perhaps we shall see the cycle repeated – although I doubt that the current generation of air marshals will be as indulgent towards the guy who lands a Typhoon wheels-up as Greig's CO was when he bent that Moth.

I found this 276-page hardback a joy to read. Those really were 'the days'. Recommended.

CGJ

Empire Of The Clouds – When Britain's Aircraft Ruled the World by James Hamilton-Paterson. Faber & Faber, 2010. £20.00

A glance around the auditorium at an RAFHS seminar will reveal an audience which, for the most part, was brought up and involved in the British aviation arena during the so-called 'glory years' of the industry and the military services and civil airlines that it supported.

The end of the Second World War may have revealed a nation exhausted and deep in debt but it also found an aviation industry which was amongst the world's largest and with a research and development backbone, probably second to none.

In the years which followed, most of those involved or interested in aviation will have seen the delights, doldrums and disasters which beset the industry and will have mourned its decline and the wasted

potential and opportunity. For my part, and I suspect for many others, I tended to see these events as individual happenings and until now have not thought of them as part of an evolutionary process. For me, two recent factors have conspired to change that view. First, the Society's seminar held in October 2010, traced the rise and fall of the Bristol Aeroplane Company, which was of particular interest to me, since I was brought up just outside the Filton airfield circuit and observed many of the company's products. Secondly, I was welcomed to the seminar by the Society's Chairman who gave me a book which he was confident I would be unable to put down until I had read it, cover to cover. He was right.

Hamilton-Paterson, approached the subject matter of his book in an unusual way, which might have caused a less skilled writer to wander off the track. First, he creates a framework based on his own recollections from his youth and later years. Next he describes the exploits of some of the test pilots of the era, singling out, in particular, Gloster's Bill Waterton for whom he clearly has great admiration and respect. He then overlays the political, industrial and financial imperatives which influenced, and often impeded, the aviation industry. The author does not spare the rod and he lambasts politicians and the leaders of the industry in equal measure. Along the way, issues like the Sandys Defence Review of 1957, the earlier decision to sell jet engines to the Soviets (a move Stalin believed could never happen) and the bundling up of much engine research and its despatch to a grateful US aircraft industry all receive a measure of ridicule.

The loss of a Vulcan at London Airport leads to a discussion of the problems encountered by the V-Force and its change of role to a low level bomber force. He looks critically at the development of the RAF's second-generation jet fighters: the failure of the Swift; problems with the Javelin (Waterton again) and the slow pace at which the Hunter entered service. Hamilton-Paterson's views on the failure of the early Comets illustrate how commercial aviation also suffered, with consideration being given to the little-publicised contribution of the critical angle of attack of the wing on take-off, in addition to the well known fatigue problem. The delays in the development of the Britannia are presented as evidence of the inertia which seems to have bedevilled the British aviation industry, the apparent lack of urgency with which it addressed problems being

compared unfavourably with the relatively energetic approach adopted in the USA. The author describes a number of other problems and adverse issues, although he does give credit where it is due and he cites the Viscount as a notable achievement.

I commend this 288-page book to anyone who has an interest in the post-war history of British aviation. It is at once thought-provoking, interesting and a fascinating read which explains why the promise of 1945 eventually withered to the aviation industry with which we are left today. While it is, in itself, an easily digested appreciation of the problems which were encountered, it will also provide a sound foundation on which to base further research. It will remain on my 'ready use' bookshelf, in the certain knowledge that it will be reached for frequently. Sadly, it makes its appearance just as the RAF faces the loss of several of its capabilities in yet another round of cuts.

Wg Cdr Colin Cummings

ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Royal Air Force has now existed for more than ninety years; the study of its history is deepening, and continues to be the subject of published works of consequence. Fresh attention is being given to the strategic assumptions under which military air power was first created and which largely determined policy and operations in both World Wars, the inter-war period, and in the era of Cold War tension. Material dealing with post-war history is now becoming available under the 30-year rule. These studies are important to academic historians and to the present and future members of the RAF.

The RAF Historical Society was formed in 1986 to provide a focus for interest in the history of the RAF. It does so by providing a setting for lectures and seminars in which those interested in the history of the Service have the opportunity to meet those who participated in the evolution and implementation of policy. The Society believes that these events make an important contribution to the permanent record.

The Society normally holds three lectures or seminars a year in London, with occasional events in other parts of the country. Transcripts of lectures and seminars are published in the *Journal of the RAF Historical Society*, which is distributed free of charge to members. Individual membership is open to all with an interest in RAF history, whether or not they were in the Service. Although the Society has the approval of the Air Force Board, it is entirely self-financing.

Membership of the Society costs £18 per annum and further details may be obtained from the Membership Secretary, Dr Jack Dunham, Silverhill House, Coombe, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire. GL12 7ND. (Tel 01453-843362)

THE TWO AIR FORCES AWARD

In 1996 the Royal Air Force Historical Society established, in collaboration with its American sister organisation, the Air Force Historical Foundation, the *Two Air Forces Award*, which was to be presented annually on each side of the Atlantic in recognition of outstanding academic work by a serving officer or airman. The RAF winners have been:

1996	Sqn Ldr P C Emmett PhD MSc BSc CEng MIEE
1997	Wg Cdr M P Brzezicki MPhil MIL
1998	Wg Cdr P J Daybell MBE MA BA
1999	Sqn Ldr S P Harpum MSc BSc MILT
2000	Sqn Ldr A W Riches MA
2001	Sqn Ldr C H Goss MA
2002	Sqn Ldr S I Richards BSc
2003	Wg Cdr T M Webster MB BS MRCGP MRaES
2004	Sqn Ldr S Gardner MA MPhil
2005	Wg Cdr S D Ellard MSc BSc CEng MRaES MBCS
2007	Wg Cdr H Smyth DFC
2008	Wg Cdr B J Hunt BSc MSc Mphil
2009	Gp Capt A J Byford MA MA

THE AIR LEAGUE GOLD MEDAL

On 11 February 1998 the Air League presented the Royal Air Force Historical Society with a Gold Medal in recognition of the Society's achievements in recording aspects of the evolution of British air power and thus realising one of the aims of the League. The Executive Committee decided that the medal should be awarded periodically to a nominal holder (it actually resides at the Royal Air Force Club, where it is on display) who was to be an individual who had made a particularly significant contribution to the conduct of the Society's affairs. Holders to date have been:

Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey KCB CBE AFC
Air Commodore H A Probert MBE MA

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