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ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SELECTED GLOSSARY

ACAS(T)	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Training)
AFCENT	Allied Forces Central Europe
AMP	Air Member for Personnel
APC	Armament Practice Camp
ASC	Army Service Corps
ATS	Army Territorial Service
AW	AgustaWestland
DDO	Deputy Director of Organisation
DfT	Department for Transport
D of E	Director of Equipment
D of O	Director of Organisation
D of P	Director of Postings
DPS	Director of Personal Services
DWAAF	Director of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force
FRADU	Fleet Requirements and Air Direction Unit
JAG	Judge Advocate General
JHF	Joint Helicopter Force
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production
MiC	Matron-in-Chief
MGP	Master-General of Personnel
OCF	Operational Conversion Flight
PFB	Preliminary Flying Badge
PPL	Private Pilot's Licence
PMRAFNS	Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service
QAIMNS	Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service
QARANC	Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps
QARNNS	Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service
QCVSA	Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air
QHI	Qualified Helicopter Instructor
QMAAC	Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps
RAFH	Royal Air Force Hospital
RAFM	RAF Museum
RAFMS	RAF Medical Service
RAFNS	RAF Nursing Service
SAR	Search and Rescue
SSQ	Station Sick Quarters
SH	Support Helicopter
UCL	University College London
WAAC	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
WL	Women's Legion
WRAC	Women's Royal Army Corps
WRNS	Women's Royal Naval Service
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force

A particularly fitting frontispiece for this edition of the Journal, this is Margarita Beatrice White, known as Rita (later Rita Sowrey, the mother of Air Mshl Sir Freddie Sowrey, the founder of this Society). Seen here as a Women's Legion Driver with her Ford Tender, she was collecting turkeys for the Officers Mess at Netheravon, Xmas 1916.

Having been formed in August 1915, the first manifestation of the Women's Legion (WL) was its Cookery Section, which began to handle catering at an increasing number of military hospitals and other establishments. Early in 1916 the WL created a Motor Transport Section to provide women drivers to work at home. Nominally employed by the Army Service Corps (ASC), many actually worked for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). WL drivers wore a khaki coat and skirt with a flat cap bearing the ASC badge, but those serving the RFC were eventually authorised to wear an RFC hat badge and RFC shoulder flashes. On the formation of the Women's Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918, 496 of the WL drivers who had been serving the RFC volunteered to join the new service.[1]

[1] Escott, Beryl E, *Women in Air Force Blue* (Patrick Stephens, Wellingborough, 1989) p19.

WOMEN IN THE RAF
RAF MUSEUM, HENDON, 11 October 2017

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE SOCIETY'S CHAIRMAN

Air Vice-Marshal Nigel Baldwin CB CBE–

Ladies & Gentlemen – good morning

For about 20 years or so, I've always introduced our seminars with that 'Ladies & Gentlemen' phrase, because there have usually been one or two ladies in the audience but this time I am mightily blessed by being able to welcome 42 ladies – a world record. Along with your gentlemen colleagues, you are all very welcome.

Before I introduce our Chairman for today, Air Chf Mshl Sir David Cousins, I would like to give our Society's usual thanks to Maggie Appleton, the hugely supportive CEO of the RAF Museum, and to her staff here who are so helpful. Without the Museum's constant support over the Society's life, we would have a very diminished Society. I am not sure we would have even survived for so long.

Today's Chairman held the post of AMP – Air Member for Personnel – on the Air Force Board for a couple of years before he retired in 1998 so, in that post, he will have had much experience of the role of women in the RAF. I suspect that he may even know of some skeletons tucked away in a ministerial cupboard . . .

He began his RAF career at the RAF College Cranwell as a flight cadet and went on to become Commandant in 1992. Before then he had flown Lightnings, Buccaneers, Jaguars and Tornados and had commanded RAF Laarbruch in Germany. He had been the Personal Staff Officer to our late, and much lamented, founding President, Sir Michael Beetham, when he was CAS – not least during the 1992 Falklands War. When he retired from the RAF, Sir David became the Controller and Chief Executive of the RAF Benevolent Fund.

With all of that under his belt, he will have no difficulty keeping all of us on our toes today.

Sir David – you have control.

WOMEN OF THE AIR FORCE: PIONEERS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Nina Hadaway

Having read History and Archaeology at Reading, and added an MA in Museum Studies from UCL in 2002, Nina has been on the staff at Hendon since 1998. In 2009-10, she co-curated the Museum's exhibition 'Women of the Air Force'. She is currently the Archive, Library and Research Manager.

Introduction

This opening paper focuses on the First World War. It considers the origins; the foundations upon which women have served with the Royal Air Force (RAF).

Alice Chauncey, who joined the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) and was selected for officer training in May 1918, had the distinction of being the last WRAF to be demobilised in 1920. That same year she wrote a book – *Women of the Royal Air Force* – a valuable source of information, as it offers a history of the organisation immediately after the First World War, compiled by someone who had served within it. Chauncey included a chapter entitled 'Some dry facts'. Using a combination of 'dry facts' and material from the RAF Museum's collection, this paper aims to chart how the involvement of women with the air services developed during this period. The main focus is the WRAF which was established on 1 April 1918; the only women's service to have been created at the same time as its male counterpart. However, the RAF Nursing Service, which was established in June 1918 will also feature. It must be noted that these organisations did not just form out of the blue. As with the RAF, it is important to understand their heritage in order to appreciate them more fully. This paper also aims to highlight the experiences of those women who served and to consider their contribution to the conduct of the war, and the impact that this had on them, and their legacy to those who would serve later.

Involvement

Women have been involved with aviation since its earliest days.

They attended air shows and demonstrations as avid spectators. Photographs of early balloon ascents and film footage of early flying displays show women and girls of all ages amongst the crowds. Material within the RAF Museum collection highlights that early aviators were popular with many people and held a celebrity status. This includes, for example, letters asking the flying ace, 2/Lt Frederick Sowrey, for a lock of his hair, autograph books and scrapbooks containing newspaper cuttings or photographs.[1]

Women also participated in flying. Joyrides were often available to those who could afford them at events such as the air shows at Hendon in the 1910s. Mrs Hilda Hewlett was the first woman to qualify as a pilot in the UK on 29 August 1911 and female aviators, for example Mrs Stocks, regularly took part in air shows of the period. The RAF Museum holds a shield which was presented to Mrs Stocks on the occasion of Ladies Day on 6 July 1912.

During the First World War the involvement of women with aviation can be described as varied. It ranged from working within the aircraft industry to being affected by, or even killed as a result of, air raids. The mothers, wives, sisters, fiancées, girlfriends and friends of loved ones serving with the air services endured. Pride and support manifested itself in different ways. It included applying administrative and organisational skills to ensure a regular supply of food or parcels, maintaining that vital contact with families writing letters and cards, and the wearing of sweetheart brooches. Many women were keen 'to do their bit' and the First World War witnessed an evolution in how this was undertaken.

Working with the air services

H A Jones in the sixth volume of *The War in the Air* succinctly states that, 'In the first year of the war women were mainly employed as nurses, although there were also a number of female shorthand typists.'[2] At the beginning of the war multiple volunteer groups were set up and organised to support the country's forces. Organisations such as the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and Volunteer Aid Detachments (VAD) involved women from an early stage in the war.

In 1915 the Women's Legion (WL) was created to 'help the army with its cooking and cleaning.'[3] As an experiment, the War Office agreed that women could be substituted for the men currently

The first women to be employed by the military were nurses and typists.

undertaking these and other domestic duties. This was the first time that this concept had been put into practice. The value of this approach was soon realised, and the scheme was extended from an initial convalescent camp to others and in the following year it was expanded to embrace a variety of military camps in the UK. Further opportunities were provided in 1916 when women began to be employed to drive service motor transport

1917 proved to be a turning point. In February the War Office laid down the conditions of service for women drivers in the Royal Flying Corps and Army Service Corps. The previous month a report investigating the possibility of substituting women for men in every suitable occupation outside of the front-line fighting area had been sent to the War Office. An Army Council Instruction published in March 1917 set out the terms and conditions of service for women in specified occupations along the lines of communication and at bases in France. The six classes of employment were to be:

a. Clerical, typist, shorthand typist.
b. Cooks, waitresses and domestic staff.
c. Motor transport service.

d. Store-keepers, checkers and unskilled labour.
e. Telephone and postal service.
f. Miscellaneous.

In July a further Army Council Instruction set out a scheme for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) – the first uniformed women's service. Women were to be enrolled, not enlisted, for one year or the duration of the war, whichever proved longer. Certificates of efficiency had to be presented by the women or training undertaken. The process proved to be slow with a lack of suitable recruits and a lack of suitable accommodation. The latter issue led to a reorganisation of the WAAC into two branches in December 1917. 'Mobiles' would be posted where required, either in the UK or overseas. 'Immobiles' were to be employed locally and would continue to live at home.

The critical nature of the *man*-power problem led to consideration of women being employed by the Navy too. Reports looking into how women might be employed at home stations, including those of the Royal Naval Air Service, were called for. On 4 February 1918 an Admiralty Weekly Order published the regulations for the formation of the Women's Royal Naval Service (the WRNS). Like the WAAC, it too was going to be organised into two branches – Mobiles and Immobiles.

With the formation of the Royal Air Force planned for April 1918, Jones observes that it was seen to be necessary to constitute a separate corps for women because of the specialised knowledge and skills that would be required and which

From 1916 women of the WL, and from 1917 the WAAC, attached to the RFC began to be employed as drivers, of motor-cycles, as well as cars.

had already been acquired. Substitution was also an important factor. So in April the WRAF was established and in June the RAF Nursing Service was also created.

The WRAF

With the formation of the Women's Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918, those women who were serving with the air elements of the WAAC, the WL and the WRNS were invited to transfer to the new organisation. Jones offers the following figures for those deciding to transfer:

a. From the WAAC: 67 officers and 6,738 other ranks
b. From the WRNS: 46 officers and 2,821 ratings
c. From the Women's Legion: 496 drivers

Recruitment was also extended to the public. The idea was to create a force of 90,000 airwomen but its maximum strength did not go over 25,000 in any month. Approximately 32,000 women served with the WRAF during its 2-year existence.

Parallels can be drawn with its twin organisation – the RAF. The first few months can be described as turbulent. Various issues arose, partly as a result of establishing a new service in a time of war, and these would recur in 1939 with the formation of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. There was a lack of supplies, a lack of accommodation and a lack of officers to oversee the airwomen. There were certainly challenges to overcome, both for the force in general and for the individuals involved, but these problems were gradually solved. So much so that AVM Sir William Sefton Brancker observed that the WRAF was the 'best disciplined and best turned-out women's organisation in the country.' This transformation was, and has been, attributed to the leadership and organisational skill of the WRAF's Commandant from September 1918, Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan. It can be argued, however, that other factors also need to be considered. With the WRAF on its third leader in just six months, the obstructions and delays experienced early on appear to have dissipated as every effort was made to make a success of the organisation. Several of the ideas that the Hon Violet Douglas-Pennant had tried to set in motion during her time as Commandant, such as an officer's course at Berridge House, Hampstead for example, came to fruition in

this later period. There is no doubt, however, that Dame Gwynne-Vaughan's experience and character were vital to the organisation's well-being.

Serving in the WRAF

So what was it like to serve in the WRAF? The WRAF was not a military service. The women were non-combatant. They were enrolled, not enlisted. The majority were recruited through labour exchanges for civil employment. They were civilians in uniform. The Force was a regulated, disciplined body. Standing orders included a ban on smoking whilst on duty, an alcohol ban and uniform requirements. For many, entering the service would have been a very different way of life compared to what they would have experienced while growing up under the gender restrictions inherent in late-Edwardian society.

The RAF Museum holds a permit which gives Member Kathleen Wilson permission 'to associate with' an officer of the RAF, Captain J C Barraclough. This quaint phrase reflects the attitudes of the time; the social, moral and disciplinary rules of the day. The First World War brought some relaxation in society's attitude towards young people socialising without a chaperone, for instance. The Services, however, did not encourage those in the ranks from forming relationships with officers.

It is interesting to observe that – and this strikes a chord for later decades too – despite the strict rules and orders, service life provided many freedoms and opportunities that would not have been available to women a few years earlier. Service life presented many with opportunities to establish good friendships and to experience comradeship. Florence Green, who died in 2012, was the last surviving veteran of the First World War. She served as an Officers Mess Steward and is quoted as saying that, 'I enjoyed my time in the WRAF. There were plenty of people at the airfields where I worked and they were all very good company. I would work every hour God sent but I had dozens of friends on the base and we had a great deal of fun in our spare time.'

Building on the other female services, individuals could sign up to be Mobile (serving anywhere) or Immobile (living at home and paid 14 shillings a week towards living expenses and transported to the

May 1919 – the WRAF contingent en route to join the Occupation Force in Germany – Cologne.

local base). The WRAF did not serve overseas until after the Armistice, but the first group of officers and ranks to serve in France arrived in March 1919 and between May and October a WRAF contingent was also stationed in Germany with the RAF element supporting the British Army of the Rhine, thus enabling some of the men posted there to be demobbed.

The number of trades open to the women of the WRAF was ground-breaking especially in the Technical class. Initially roles were based within the sphere of traditional 'women's work', for example domestic or clerical in nature, but over time these broadened out into new areas. Training was provided and over 50 different trades became available. These ranged from draughtswoman to welder; from pigeon-keeper to meteorologist. The nature of the work also meant that a relaxation in dress code was a practical measure – the wearing of trousers becoming acceptable in these circumstances.

Disbandment

With the cessation of hostilities, the RAF was severely reduced in numbers. Fighting for its own survival, and forced to make economic choices, it was decided to disband the WRAF. The reaction to this was

The nature of their work meant that it became increasingly acceptable for women to wear trousers.

mixed. Many women were ready to get back to normality. For a number of families, the war continued, but in a different form with returning loved ones still battling the effects of their experiences. Others were able to pursue the new opportunities available to them as a result of the skills and experience they had gained during their service. In her illustrated book, *Eight Months with the Women's Royal Air Force*, Gertrude George noted the 'keen pang of regret' for many on receiving their notice of demobilisation.

For the Nursing Service a merger with the Army Nursing Service was considered but no monetary saving would have resulted from this, so the service was able to retain its discrete identity. In January 1921 it was established by Royal Charter as a permanent branch of the RAF and in June 1923 it became Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service.

Legacy

The Old Comrades Association was formed soon after the WRAF was disbanded. In 1924 Dame Gwynne-Vaughan wrote to Lord Trenchard to thank him for attending the annual dinner and meeting. Within her letter, held by the RAF Museum, she wrote, 'It will always be a proud memory that [*the women*] had the honour of serving with the Royal Air Force' and that they are 'standing by till […] the RAF can once more include them – but next time as enlisted airwomen.'

In 1929 Lord Trenchard picked up on this theme commenting that, 'I do not look upon the W of the WRAF as anything more than an unnecessary initial put at the beginning of it. It was all part of the RAF and I am sure it would be again.'

Conclusion

To conclude, war is a catalyst for change and this can manifest itself in many ways. The women's services were born out of necessity with many joining with a sense of 'doing one's bit.' Their work, and their contribution to the war effort, were vital. In many ways the service given by the women during this period was ground-breaking and laid the foundations for what has followed. With the disbandment of the WRAF in 1920 the integral link which had become established with the RAF was broken, with the consequence that the WAAF at the beginning of the Second World War had to prove itself all over again. Many links were maintained, however, because men and women who had served in the First World War went on to serve in the Second.

As we move closer to marking the RAF's centenary it is timely to be exploring the topic of women in the Royal Air Force. From the perspective of the RAF Museum, looking at the past and looking to the future, it has been encouraging to see a definite increase in the number of people wanting to discover more about the role of women in the RAF.

Further reading:

Beauman, K B; *Partners in Blue* (Hutchinson, London, 1971).
Chauncey, A; *Women of the Royal Air Force* (Royal Air Force Old Comrade's Association, 1920).
Escott, Beryl; *Women in Air Force Blue* (Patrick Stephens, Wellingborough, 1989).
George, G; *Eight Months with the Women's Royal Air Force* (Heath Cranton Ltd, London, 1920).
Jones, H A; *The War in the Air: Being the story of the part played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force, Vol VI* (Oxford Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1937).
TNA AIR 2/93/CW1528; *RAF Constitution and Regulations of the Women's Royal Air Force*, 1918.

Notes:

[1] 2/Lt Frederick Sowrey became a household name during the First World War after he shot down Zeppelin L32 in 1916 and engaged with Gotha bombers whilst on Home Defence duties in the UK.

[2] Jones, H A; *The War in the Air: Being the story of the part played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force, Vol VI* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1937) pp70-71. Pages 70-74 offer a useful general overview of the developments which took place in women working with the air services and this forms the basis for this section of the paper.

[3] *Ibid*, p71. The Marchioness of Londonderry made this suggestion because of a shortage of trained cooks.

CREATING A MILITARY IDENTITY? THE WAAF IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Dr Tessa Stone

Tessa read History at Cambridge from 1991, culminating in a PhD in 1999; the title of her thesis is reflected in the title of this paper. Her subsequent career has been within the charity sector and since 2013 she has been Chief Executive of 'Farms for City Children', which offers, an annual 3,250 children, a week-long experience of living and working on one of the farms it runs in Devon, Gloucestershire and Pembrokeshire.

When I first started my research into the WAAF, over 20 years ago, they were very much an historiographical footnote. As they had been an adjunct to the RAF so they were an adjunct to the history of the Service, and of the war. Working in the field of gender history, it fascinated me that very little work had been done on those women, the women who had posed the greatest threat to gender stereotypes in that generation – those who joined the Forces. There were a few autobiographical accounts from WAAF who served and a couple of official Service histories, but the WAAF and their army and navy counterparts had not captured the public imagination in the way the munitionettes[1] had, and the fact that we had *conscripted* women into the Armed Services seemed to be a shock to everyone I mentioned it to.

There is nothing an historian likes better than a story untold – and a good set of sources: reams of official RAF and Ministry of War correspondence; eleven boxes of papers belonging to the Director of the WAAF, Dame Jane Trefusis-Forbes; a fantastic array of contemporaneous published accounts; several archives of recorded oral testimonies; and a cadre of WAAF, then in their seventies and eighties, many of whom had never shared their stories in detail before.

The formation of the WAAF needs setting in its historical context. Women had served with the brand new Royal Air Force almost since

[1] Munitionettes were women employed in munitions factories during WW I; by mid-1917 some 80% of munitions were being produced by women. **Ed**

Munitionettes and one of their Ruston-built Camels in Lincoln.

its inception in 1918, and when the Women's Royal Air Force was disbanded, on 1 April 1920, 31,000 airwomen had served in 53 trades, and 556 officers had served in five branches.[1] The RAF had history, then, of employing women at speed, at scale, and across a large range of roles. It is this fact that makes what happened next all the more surprising.

From the early 1930s, as the political situation in Europe worsened, so those who had led the women's Services 15 years earlier started the call to re-form. Lady Londonderry proposed in 1934 that all the women's organisations associated with the Services should come together into the Women's Legion, but although an Officers' Training Section was formed, the Committee of Imperial Defence decided in March 1936 that there was no need for a peacetime women's reserve. [2]

The women who had led their Forces in the Great War were, needless to say, not prone to taking 'No' for an answer, and by October 1936 the Emergency Service had broken away from the Women's Legion under the leadership of Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan. From this point on it was the Army Council which took the lead, officially recognising the Emergency Service in December 1937 and, on 6 May 1938, re-launching it as a new women's umbrella service, the Women's Auxiliary Defence Service. It quickly, and sensibly, recognised that WADS would be an unfortunate acronym, and so the Army Territorial Service (ATS) started to enrol those

women who wished to serve. There were of course a number who wished to serve the RAF, and in late August 1938 it was agreed that women enrolled for duties with the RAF would form separate companies and wear an RAF armband. On 9 September 1938 the ATS was formally established by Royal Warrant, and on 10 October recruitment began, in five trades: clerks; cooks; drivers; equipment assistants and orderlies.

Air Chf Cmdt Jane Trefusis-Forbes, DWAAF 1939-43.

On 27 October 1938, the first two companies of women were affiliated to No 601 (Fighter) Squadron at Hendon and No 1 Balloon Centre at Kidbrooke. Although slow on the uptake, the RAF was not long content with the War Office taking the lead, and on 19 January 1939 control of all RAF-affiliated companies transferred to the Air Ministry. By April the powers that be were even considering whether a woman should be appointed to the Air Ministry to oversee this fledging service, and on 20 April it was declared to be 'desirable to break right away from the War Office, form our own Force, and call it the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, with the short title WAAF'.[3] It was also agreed that the WAAF should wear Air Force Blue, despite there being 'not a stitch of blue material, suitable for women's wear in the RAF, in existence!'[4] On 28 June 1939 the WAAF was created by Royal Warrant, and a woman *was* appointed to the Air Ministry to oversee the Service: Jane Trefusis-Forbes, Head of the ATS School of Instruction, was appointed Director of the WAAF on 1 July and on the 2nd the WAAF made their first official appearance at the Royal Review of the Services and Civil Defence Organisations in Hyde Park – wearing a uniform of Air Force Blue.[5]

This easy recounting of the timeline of the WAAF's formation belies its difficult beginning. In the first instance, of course, the most important focus was the scaling-up of the RAF: 'It is axiomatic that

The WAAF on parade, in blue, for the first time.
Hyde Park, 2 July 1939.

the training of women must not be allowed to interfere with the training of the Regular, Auxiliary or Reserve Personnel.'[6] Secondly, the Treasury was then, as now, intransigent. Even after it had agreed to the formation of the WAAF it continued to hold out against 'the idea of a paid woman advisor, [*which*] appears to us to be both premature as to administrative function and unnecessary on general principles,' suggesting instead that an upper class, public spirited lady should be found, who would do the job 'as a matter of public duty'.[7] When the Treasury did finally relent, the newly appointed Director of the WAAF found herself alone, literally, in the Air Ministry. Her colleagues were, to a man, on leave throughout July and August 1939, and thus 'no particular help seemed to come from any quarter, [*making it*] extremely difficult to get down to the fundamental basis of the WAAF. . .'[8]

There were massive practical problems to the quick establishment of the WAAF. The lack of suitable blue fabric for uniforms was nothing compared to the 'complete absence of any women's

accommodation at stations'.[9] At this point let us remind ourselves of the scale of the WRAF when it was disbanded in 1920: 31,000 airwomen were serving in 53 trades, commanded by 556 officers in five branches. The official attitude to the role of women in the Air Force in the interwar years profoundly shaped my own professional view of our systemic inability to learn from the past. At an Air Ministry conference in July 1939 it was suggested that the WAAF would be limited in wartime to 5,000 personnel overall, and no WAAF tradeswomen would be required at all for the first few months of war.[10] While DWAAF pointed out to her colleagues that the quick expansion of the WRAF to a strength of 25,000 suggested that 5,000 was likely to be a substantial underestimation, the matter remained unresolved.

The Air Ministry may have been on holiday in August 1939, but on the ground the RAF was scaling-up, and very much including the WAAF in its plans. RAF stations, their requests for other rank personnel to fulfil their trade requirements going unanswered by the powers that be, had made their own *ad hoc* arrangements and found the WAAF 'a place in the machinery of the unit'.[11] And while the Air Ministry was still discussing, as late as 26 August, whether 'the expedients we have been forced to adopt [*should be*] place[*d*] on a regular footing', it was the imminence of the outbreak of war that finally forced it to mobilise the WAAF – then numbering 1,734 women – on 28 August.[12] On 1 September the order was given that 'the establishments of existing companies have been expanded to include "airwomen" and enrolments to complete establishments may now be proceeded with' and that accommodation for the women on stations should immediately be made available.[13] The effect of this instruction, which was contrary to all pre-war planning, on RAF stations preparing for war and anticipating immediate air attacks, can only be imagined.

The response to this call was immediate, and by 30 September 8,000 women had enrolled. Forced to grant new airwomen paid leave until they could be received at a station, recruitment was suspended on 6 October. On 13 February 1940 WAAF establishment was finally properly placed onto a formal RAF War Establishment basis, and when recruiting at last reopened on 15 April it was under the responsibility of the RAF Inspector of Recruiting.

WAAF drivers hauled, and armed, bombs – in all weathers.

Substitution

The main aim of the WAAF was 'to effect, where desirable, the substitution of women for RAF personnel in certain appointments and trades throughout the RAF.'[14] Decisions about what substitution was 'desirable' fell to the Substitution Committee, and its initial premise was that five WAAF would be needed to substitute for four RAF. Far more fraught a decision than the appropriate substitution ratios, however, was the desirability – and suitability – of women performing particular tasks. For while women were 'reliable in repetitive occupations' they 'lacked an inherent mechanical instinct and could not be trained to reach the degree of skill required' in RAF technical trades.[15]

Class played an important role in the consideration of the employment of women, too. When considering using women for a task such as Radio Direction Finding, 'it was important to decide […] whether to employ the working classes who were the more highly trained, or the professional classes who might show more intelligence and sense of responsibility.'[16] And then of course the conditions on some air bases would be far too strenuous for women. The Air Officer Commanding Balloon Command was quite sure that the 'mud, gales, rain, snow and cold' they might encounter on a balloon site called for 'physical exertion far beyond the capacity of the WAAFs.'[17]

Much of the literature regarding women's role in wartime discusses the fact that the sheer desperate necessity of employing women as widely as possible helped to shatter such illusions, and as the war progressed the Substitution Committee, strongly encouraged by DWAAF, took it upon itself to test the accuracy of such stereotypes. In March 1941 it was agreed to experiment with the employment of WAAF in certain technical trades 'to see whether it would be possible to train women.'[18] Balloon Command too was

From electricians to radar operators, WAAFs eventually worked in 75 trades.

ordered to experiment with 100% substitution of women for men at certain sites, and despite his initial assumption about the capacity of the WAAFs the Air Officer Commanding was delighted with the results, and relieved that 'neurosis and nervous breakdown have been found to be no greater among the balloon operator personnel than amongst airwomen of other trades generally. Further the incidence of menstrual irregularities has been shown to be no more common than with women in civilian life.'[19]

In April 1941 the Substitution Committee made a crucial, and ground-breaking decision. Henceforth its deliberations about the employment of WAAF would be based on the broad principle 'that no job shall be done by a man which would be done equally well by a woman.'[20] And their readiness to insist, sometimes in the face of considerable internal opposition, that women be given the opportunity to prove their capacities meant that by the end of the war airwomen were substituting airmen 1:1 in 75 trades, including the most highly skilled Group I and II trades such as electrician and flight mechanic.

Indeed, DWAAF felt in the end that the RAF was a beacon of enlightened thinking, and that 'the ready acceptance by the RAF of the WAAF in a large variety of skilled trades […] has given women in the WAAF greater opportunities than in other spheres of war work.'[21] This view was shared by the WAAF themselves. As one recounted to

me, ‘I think the WAAF, because they did more specialised jobs […] were given more recognition from the men in the RAF, more than the ATS were from the Army’, while another took a dim view of her Naval colleagues: ‘the WRNS were mostly, I thought, typists’. Most importantly, the WAAF I spoke to felt that their contribution to the war was crucial. ‘We were very much in the front of the war’, said one, and indeed even when the task was relatively dull, as one Radar Operator told me, ‘our war was unexciting but our job was important, we were necessary to the war.’

The WAAF’s legal status

Another signifier of the WAAF’s importance to the war effort is demonstrated by their legal status. In 1918 the WRAF had been enrolled, not enlisted, and as such were not legally bound to the Service. This affected discipline – if they wished, they could walk away from the job without sanction – but was also deeply ‘unfair to woman in respect of leave, pay, status, care of dependents, compensations for deterioration of health and other particulars . . .’[22] True to form, the Air Ministry took a while to resolve the anomalous position and, when it was initially established, the WAAF, as the WRAF before them, served only as civilians. However, on 25 April 1941 the Defence (Women’s Forces) Regulation designated the WAAF ‘members of the Armed Forces of the Crown’ to whom the Air Force Act could be applied ‘as if they were part of the regular Air Force.’[23] Henceforth WAAF officers could be granted commissions, and the WAAF subject to full military discipline.

Or could they? It is a measure of the persistence of gendered stereotypes that the precise legal significance of the Defence Regulations was quickly challenged:

> ‘The Air Force Act shall apply to women in the WAAF “as if they were part of the regular Air Force”. It seems therefore that it would not necessarily be correct to interpret it as equivalent to the Air Force. There seems to be a general doubt as to the precise significance of the phrase Armed Forces of the Crown, and I am afraid that we do not know exactly wherein the distinction lies between Air Force and Armed Forces of the Crown.’[24]

Indeed Sir Henry MacGeagh, the Judge Advocate General, was quite clear. The WAAF's 'status as civilians for the purpose of the application of the act is not affected. They are not, in fact, members of H.M Forces.'[25] The reasoning behind his decision was only in part based on a legal judgement. Throughout discussion of the matter he had argued from the position that the Air Force Constitution Act of 1917 referred only to men, much to DWAAF's obvious frustration; 'at Act period they were hardly likely to say women, as women were not at Act period contemplated.'[26] His legal opinion was inextricably linked, however, to his personal opinion that women 'have always been, and still are, disqualified by their sex from becoming members of His Majesty's military or Air Forces.'[27] DWAAF's marginal notes again reveal her extreme ire; 'This blighter should have been scuttled at birth, no?'[28] As she saw it, 'we are not two services, but one', and 'equality, and that spirit of solid comradeship that goes with it, is the rock on which is founded the morale, morals, efficiency and mutual pride of airmen and airwomen on a station.'

When it came to it, luckily for DWAAF, it is clear that the finer details of such a ruling passed most WAAF, and their RAF colleagues, by. Both airwomen, and often their Commanding Officers, were largely unaware of (or chose to ignore) the limitations under which Air Force law applied to the WAAF. Yet, while the understanding those women I spoke to had of their precise military status was mixed and imprecise, their self-identity was based squarely on an unambiguous sense of their membership of a military service: 'I no longer belonged in civilian life'; 'you weren't a civilian any more;' 'it's a world on its own when you're in the services, and people outside don't know what it's like.'[29] And, despite the Judge Advocate General's ruling, several ex-WAAF still viewed themselves as service personnel when being interviewed 50 years later, 'I think it's wonderful, I really do, that I can talk to someone who's interested. One can't speak to a civilian in the same way.'[30]

Press coverage of the WAAF captured perfectly the tension between these two understandings: of women embedded in the RAF, whose role in the war was crucial and signalled an unprecedented degree of equality; and of their distinctive feminine qualities which could not, and indeed should not, be altered by their role in the WAAF. The WAAF were described by contemporary commentators

WAAFs were addressed by sundry wartime advertising campaigns, including Kolynos toothpaste . . .

as 'an efficient fighting force' who were 'on active service in the front line' performing 'tasks quite unheard of in earlier times.'[31] But, while they were 'courageous, resourceful, gallant, responsible, and not soft,' concerns about the potentially brutalising effect of military uniform and lifestyle were never far away.[32] To counter such concerns, balloon operators were described making a 'picturesque group in their dungarees and knitted caps or cloth berets on fair, blonde, auburn or dark hair, with their rosy cheeks and dark eyes.'[33]

The more physical elements of military life apparently provided the route to the perfect figure; 'Girls who are rather light put on weight and girls who are rather too heavy take if off after a few months in the WAAF.'[34] The practical attributes of femininity were not being jeopardised by military service either, the public was reassured. Servicewomen on RAF bases lived in 'pleasant little houses' with a 'cheerful and home-like atmosphere', while these 'girls' towns' were reassuringly 'full of sparkling windows, spotless paint and shining brass, for each girl wants her house to be the prettiest and best kept.'[35] It is notable that the RAF itself, as the end of the war approached, saw fit to reassure its servicemen that service in the WAAF had not 'detracted from the feminine qualities' of their women, but rather served to reinforce their interest and readiness for their traditional role of wife and mother: 'They still had time to knit and execute delicate sewing [*and*] are deeply interested in the domestic sphere of cookery, homecraft and mother craft.'[36]

Advertisements can be a potent source of historical evidence. While they often harness and play on established public perceptions – as demonstrated by the very many advertisements for lipstick, face

. . . Yardley cosmetics and Tampax.

powder or blusher that promised to provide the perfect antidote to the ATS's deeply unflattering khaki uniform – as the war went on we see cosmetic products harnessing a new more nuanced rhetoric, and seeking to align themselves with women's new-found equality. Kolynos toothpaste compared its own 'essential service to the health of the nation' directly with that of the WAAF, who have 'shouldered responsibilities and proved their sterling worth'. In a remarkable Yardley advertisement an unsmiling airwoman holds our gaze sternly above the headline 'No Surrender' and explains 'War gives us a chance to show our mettle. We wanted equal rights with men, they took us at our word. We are proud to work for victory beside them.' Most notably of all, Tampax, first advertised in the USA in 1936, seized on the 'spacious' new roles women were performing in the services by suggesting that it was Tampax that made it possible for 'women to do a man's job', by liberating them from their 'natural disabilities', all under the striking slogan 'Women of the Services are winning the war of freedom.'

This very brief exploration of the gendered identity of women in the WAAF in the Second World War only scratches the surface of the complexities, nuances and tensions of women's military identity between 1939 and 1945. DWAAF herself was characteristically

absolutely clear that a Rubicon had been crossed by the WAAF, and by them alone of the three women's services:

> 'The Directors of the ATS and WRNS are of the opinion, I believe, that psychologically there is to their service a great difference between women having immediate responsibility for the killing of men and being indirectly responsible. [*They*] believe it would be detrimental to the 'womanliness of women' to be actually responsible. […] Our service has been doing the equivalent of 'indirect killing' since the outbreak of war. It was suggested by the other services […] that the other ranks would think there was a great difference between the handling of lethal weapons and indirectly handling them. I think our airwomen must be made of a higher mentality. It is perfectly clear to them that they are indirectly responsible for the destruction of human beings and that there is so little difference between this and being directly responsible that it is not worth considering. It should be realised that there is little hypocrisy in our Service.[37]

I suspect that Group Captain Sherit's story later in this volume of the post-war path to combatant status for women in the RAF would prompt a flurry of acerbic marginal notes from DWAAF, and rekindle her deep frustration at the Service's inability to learn from its own hard-won experience. I also suspect however that, without her leadership, and without the military identity created by the WAAF between 1939 and 1945, that story would have been even slower to come to fruition.

Notes:

1 Air Ministry (Air Historical Branch) Publication 3234, *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force* (1953) p.1.

2 For a fuller history of the WRAF and the interwar years see Beryl Escott's *Women in Air Force Blue* (Patrick Stephens, Wellingborough, 1989).

3 TNA AIR2/4026, encl 7a. ATS RAF Companies, minutes of meeting, 20 April 1939.

4 D of E to S11(c), 15 March 1939, TNA AIR2/3100, encl. 5a.

5 Jane Trefusis-Forbes served as DWAAF until 1 October 1943, when she was succeeded by Dame Mary Walsh.

6 TNA AIR2/3115, minute 12. E A Shearing, S11 to AMP thro' DPS, 2 June 1939.

7 TNA AIR2/4026, encl 8b. Treasury to W G Nott-Bower at Air Ministry, 20 May 1939.

[8] RAFM AC72/17, box 4. Diary-style notes, unattributed but DWAAF, November 1939.
[9] TNA AIR2/4026, encl 7a. ATS RAF Companies, minutes of meeting, 20 April 1939.
[10] RAFM AC 72/17, box 4. 'Expansion of the WAAF', DWAAF, 1941 with note added 1942.
[11] TNA AIR2/4061, encl 1a. DPS to AMP, 24 August 1939.
[12] TNA AIR2/4061, minute 3. DDO to D of O, 26 August 1939.
[13] TNA AIR2/3115, encl 30a, emphasis in original. E A Shearing, S11(c) to all Commands, Groups, stations, 1 September 1939.
[14] Air Ministry Order A578/40.
[15] TNA AIR2/8207, encl 1a. Standing Committee to consider substitution of WAAF for RAF personnel, interim report, April 1941.
[16] TNA AIR2/3323, encl 23a. Women Observers RDF, undated but March or June 1939.
[17] TNA AIR2/4710, encl 1b. Memorandum on the substitution of RAF personnel by WAAFs in Balloon Command, Air Marshal Sir Leslie Gossage, 10 March 1941.
[18] TNA AIR2/8207, encl 1a. Standing Committee to consider substitution of WAAF for RAF personnel, interim report, April 1941.
[19] TNA AIR2/4710, encl 42b. 'WAAF substitution in Balloon Command', by Air Marshal Gossage, AOC Balloon Command, 30 September 1942.
[20] Air publication 3234, p84.
[21] RAFM AC 72/17, box 6. Undated report.
[22] RAFM AC 72/17, box 1. H. Gwynne-Vaughan, WRAF Commandant, to D of P, 4 December 1919.
[23] TNA AIR2/4646 *passim*. Air Publication 3234, pp18-19.
[24] TNA AIR2/6238, encl. 49d. Metcalfe to Ministry of Health, 10 November 1941.
[25] TNA AIR24/1654, appendix VIII. S11 to AMP, 8 May 1942.
[26] RAFM AC72/17 box 9. JAG to PAS(P), 15 June 1940, DWAAF's marginal notes.
[27] *Ibid*. JAG to PAS(P), 15 June 1940,
[28] *Ibid*. JAG to PAS(P), 15 June 1940, DWAAF's marginal notes.
[29] IWM DD 88/2/1. Romano, WAAF15, WAAF2.
[30] IWM DSR 14609/7 Bray.
[31] Bentley Beaumann's *Wings On Her Shoulders* (London, 1943) p41; Margaret Goldsmith's *Women at War*, (Edinburgh, 1942) p76; V Douie's *Daughters of Britain* (Oxford, 1949) p21. See also M D Cox's *British Women at War* (London, 1941) p7, Phyllis Bottome's *Formidable to Tyrants* (London, 1941) p152 and V Nobles' *Girls, you amaze me*, p7.
[32] Goldsmith *Women at War*, pp51 & 54.
[33] Scott, Peggy; *They Made Invasion Possible*, (London, 1944) p54.
[34] *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 1942.
[35] *The Times*, 1 April 1940, *News Chronicle (London)*, 1 April 1940.
[36] *RAF Quarterly* 16, 4 (1945)
[37] TNA AIR24/1645, appendix X. DWAAF to AMP, 24 November 1941.

EARNING THEIR WINGS – FLYING IN THE ATA AND WRAFVR

Peter Elliott

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In October 1937 the *Daily Mail* published an article by Amy Johnson arguing for the formation of an Air Force Reserve in which women could undertake a number of roles, including flying air ambulances and ferrying aircraft from the factories.[1] There seems to have been little response to this suggestion, but the following year the Civil Air Guard (CAG) was formed; offering flying training – subsidised by the Air Ministry through flying clubs – to men and women aged between 18 and 50. At its peak there were between 800 and 900 women in the CAG, approximately a quarter of them pilots.[2]

The Director General of Civil Aviation, Sir Francis Shelmerdine, was working on a scheme to use experienced pilots, who were ineligible for RAF service, for communications duties in light aircraft. He envisaged the role of National Air Communications as the transport of dispatches and mail, medical supplies, personnel (civil authorities, medical officers and ambulance work) and cooperation with the police and fire brigades.[3] It was expected that the RAF would be able to cope with the ferrying of aircraft, having set up its own ferry pools. However, with the outbreak of war, civil flying ceased and the CAG was disbanded.

In parallel with this process, the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) was being set up under the leadership of Gerard d'Erlanger. He was a director of British Airways Ltd, which became part of the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC). The management of the ATA was undertaken by BOAC, who employed the pilots and ground

Head of the women's section, Senior Commander Miss Pauline Gower.

staff, whilst operational control of the ATA was the responsibility of the Ministry of Aircraft Production. d'Erlanger was supplied by the Air Ministry with a list of pilots holding the 'A' licence – effectively the Private Pilot's Licence (PPL) – and by September some 30 applications 'mostly of good quality' had been received from men on the list.[4] The RAF's ferry pools were soon reinforced with ATA men; once the ATA was fully up and running these pools came under its control, and a number of RAF pilots were loaned to the new organisation.

Thus the ATA started with only male pilots, many of whom were too old or unfit for RAF service – it was argued that ATA stood for 'Ancient and Tattered Aviators' but it had already been decided in September 1939 that selected women of experience could be utilised as delivery pilots. Pauline Gower, who had argued for women to fly with the ATA, was appointed head of the women's section. The recruitment of women, however, was placed on hold until late 1939, when the Air Ministry requested eight women pilots to ferry Tiger Moths from Hatfield; it was also expected that women would be needed to ferry Magisters from Reading. The first female ferry pool formed at Hatfield in January 1940. In fact, this was the first ATA Ferry Pool, since the male ATA pilots at that time were still attached to RAF ferry pools. The announcement of women pilots was greeted with protests from (amongst others) the National Men's Defence League, and even some women.[5]

Nevertheless, the ATA grew. In June 1940 Home Commands and Groups were asked to provide details of WAAF officers and airwomen with at least 150 solo flying hours, for transfer to the ATA.[6] Demand for pilots increased, and women with less experience were sought; in December 1943 there were 2,000 applicants for 60 vacancies. Between 1940 and 1945 a total of 166 female pilots flew with the ATA – around 12·6% of ATA aircrew – and fourteen female

Pauline Gower (left) with the first eight female ATA pilots.

pilots were killed, together with one flight engineer.

In June 1940 Lady Mary Bailey wrote[7] to the Director of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (DWAAF) suggesting the formation of a flying branch whose members would fly ambulance aircraft and ferry other types. Her letter was circulated within the Air Ministry for comment, but the general view was that the ATA worked perfectly well on a civilian basis and that a Pilot Section of the WAAF would involve the Air Ministry in extra accommodation, rationing and other administrative matters. Lady Mary was herself a pioneering pilot – the first woman to fly the Irish Sea, and in 1928 she had flown solo to Cape Town. During the war she served briefly in the ATA and was then commissioned into the WAAF.

Although a number of WAAF officers and airwomen were eventually released for service with the ATA, the idea of a WAAF flying branch was resurrected in March 1943. The Admiralty had proposed enrolling qualified pilots into the WRNS for duties which were essentially similar to those performed by the ATA, claiming that the WRNS was understaffed and thus its women could not be released to the ATA.[8] The Air Ministry felt that it would be embarrassing if 'Wrens' were to be able to fly whilst WAAFs were not. A more practical point was that the WRNS would be competing with the ATA for candidates; this view – and the assertion that one organisation

The picture that says it all. At just 5 ft 2 in, Flt Capt Joan Hughes is dwarfed by a Stirling. She had already logged 600 hours by the age of 22 and was the only woman rated as an ATA instructor on all types.

would be more efficient than three – was put to the Treasury, which turned down the Admiralty proposal.[9] In effect, the Admiralty had been planning to transfer selected pilots from the ATA to the WRNS, to make up a shortfall in pilots for second-line duties.

By August 1943 the supply of qualified pilots for the ATA had almost run out and plans were being made for ATA recruits to be given *ab initio* pilot training. Some RAF pilots had been seconded to

the ATA, but the Air Ministry proposed releasing volunteers from the WAAF to join the ATA. These women would then receive ATA rates of pay, appreciably more generous than the RAF pay which the seconded male pilots received. The Ministry of Aircraft Production did not entirely agree with this proposal and urged the formation of a flying branch of the WAAF, from which pilots could be seconded in the same way as their male colleagues.[10] It took the view that all service aircraft should be flown by service pilots and pointed out that such a branch would enhance WAAF prestige. The Air Council felt that it would be difficult to promote such a branch, when they had so recently argued against the Admiralty's suggestion and confirmed its view that the small number of women involved in ferrying would be administered more effectively if only one body – the ATA – were to be responsible.

Undeterred, Air Chf Mshl Sir Wilfrid Freeman, Chief Executive of the MAP, wrote to the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chf Mshl Sir Charles Portal, in December 1943 noting: 'The main objection now put forward is [...] the amount of administrative work that would devolve on AMP and his staff for so small a force. I suppose, had he lived a hundred years ago, Sutton would have objected on similar grounds to the abolition of slavery.'[11] Support also came from Air Chf Mshl Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, at that time CinC Allied Expeditionary Air Force. He expressed his concern to the Air Ministry, that denying members of the WAAF the opportunity to fly would adversely affect recruiting. He found it deplorable 'that volunteers should be called from the ranks of a flying service to leave that service in order to learn to fly.'[12] The ATS, he pointed out, helped to man anti-aircraft batteries, and Wrens manned craft at sea, but members of the WAAF, which was an integral part of the Royal Air Force, could not share in the RAF's essential function, namely flying.

About this time Freeman wrote to Portal expressing his disappointment at the Air Council's decision. Portal in turn discussed the letter with the Secretary of State at the Air Ministry who proposed that, rather than just form a WAAF flying branch, the Air Ministry should take over the ATA and the Aircraft Storage Units. Any female ATA pilots who did not wish to transfer to the WAAF would be gradually phased out. The Air Member for Supply and Organisation (AMSO), Air Chf Mshl Sir Christopher Courtney, agreed that this

would improve discipline and boost WAAF morale. He also put forward the idea that the RAF should undertake the selection and flying training of WAAF personnel.[13] Between ten and fifteen women would be trained each month, which would exceed the number of ATA women after about a year; it ought to be possible after a further year to absorb the ATA women, were it to prove desirable. CAS endorsed this suggestion and asked the Air Member for Training to look into it further.[14] It appears that AMT and AMP were not in favour, however – perhaps because by early 1944 it had become apparent that there would be a surplus of male RAF pilots, who could be used for ferrying. Some thirty members of the WAAF had been selected for training, but plans were already being made for the rundown of the ATA and it seems that their training did not proceed.

The story resumes in February 1947 when the Air Council discussed a paper by AMP (Air Chf Mshl Sir John Slessor) on women officers in the permanent service.[15] This paper suggested that a limited number of women be given flying training and also asked that consideration be given to the formation of a non-regular WAAF flying branch. The Air Council approved the proposals in principle, but asked for a more detailed investigation of the problems involved. The Secretary of State for Air announced in Parliament in March of that year that 'it was proposed, when circumstances permitted, to train and employ a very limited number of women, beginning as aircrew, for non-combatant duties in communication flights, anti-aircraft co-operation, etc. Consideration was also being given to the formation of a flying branch for women in the reserve, into which women who were already qualified pilots could be entered.'[16]

An Air Ministry committee discussed this at its meeting on 28 March 1947.[17] It was suggested that women should not be brought into the service specially to fly, but existing officers should be given flying training so that they could fly when the opportunity arose. In other words, their idea was that – rather than recruit women solely to fly – WAAF officers, such as those in Personal Assistant posts, would be trained to fly light communications aircraft and would act as pilots to their principals. In June the Air Council Standing Committee concluded that there were limited opportunities for women to be employed as pilots, navigators and signallers, but they could be used as staff pilots at navigation, signalling and gunnery schools.[18] They

Plt Off Jackie Moggridge wearing the preliminary flying badge (see page 38).

noted that much experience was required before a pilot was allowed to fly passenger-carrying aircraft, but suggested that this could be built up by instructing at Elementary Flying Training Schools, testing at Maintenance Units, ferrying and anti-aircraft co-operation. VCAS disagreed with this last point, pointing out that the ideal target was a radio-controlled aircraft in the 400-500 mph region, and that the days of the towed target were over.[19] AMP pointed out the existing backlog of aircrew awaiting training, and warned of resentment if women were seen to be receiving training instead of men. Potential WAAF pilots would need to be trained at separate schools from their male colleagues, since their non-combatant duties required a separate syllabus. ACAS(T) was of the opinion that, 'Measured simply as a stimulus to WAAF recruiting it would be costly, and it would in fact be cheaper to double their pay.' The Committee concluded that the proposals for the regular flying branch should be postponed, but that the non-regular scheme should go ahead as fast as possible.

In 1949 the Air Council reconsidered the proposal, at the request of AMP, who felt that the regular scheme would stimulate recruiting.[20] Doubts were expressed as to whether there was spare flying training capacity and whether WRAF pilots could be usefully employed in peacetime. Other members of the Air Council disagreed, and suggested that National Service men should not be trained at the expense of regular members of the WRAF. AMP's recommendation, that a limited number of volunteer officers be trained to wings standard (six pilots, three navigators and three signallers), was approved in general but, once again, the scheme was postponed due to overloading in Flying Training Command. Slessor, by then CAS, wrote to the Secretary of State in February 1950, 'I cannot believe that, with our present critical shortage of trained aircrews […] we are

justified in spending a penny or a man-hour in training WRAF officers to fly.'[21] He felt that the small number of women to be trained would have little or no effect on recruiting, and recommended that the scheme be reviewed in twelve months' time. No trace of such a review appears in the Air Council minutes before December 1954, when the meeting approved a suggestion by AMP to drop the scheme, 'but to make no announcement unless the matter was raised from outside.'[22]

Following the announcement that the Air Ministry was investigating a non-regular flying branch of the WAAF, details of the WAAFVR List (Flying) were released in July 1947.[23] Conditions of service were essentially similar to those for men in the RAFVR, although the engagement – initially for two years – took the form of a signed undertaking, rather than attestation. Candidates were to be between 18 and 30 years of age, of British nationality, and to be qualified pilots with at least 100 hours solo. Fifteen days' continuous training and 130 hours training at weekends and evenings were required each year, to include 20 hours flying in each phase. A Flying Training Bounty and a Training Expenses Allowance would be paid. Training would be carried out at RAF Reserve Centres and Reserve Flying Schools (RFS); a target of 200 pilots had been set, and members would be enrolled in the NCO rank of Pilot IV.

The first two recruits were Margot Gore and Joan Naylor, both former ATA pilots.[24] By the end of the first year, 33 pilots had been enrolled, and in November 1948 the Air Ministry agreed to consider applications for a limited number of those on the list to be given officer status.[25] The first five commissions were announced in late 1949.[26] Since the target of 200 pilots had not been reached, it was decided in 1948 to relax the standards slightly by admitting ex-WAAFs who held a PPL, but this decision was later reversed. The intention was to keep the standard of reserve pilots high, and the reserve would in time be fed by a flow of trained women pilots from the regular force. As we have seen, the introduction of the regular scheme was repeatedly postponed, and a Volunteer Reserve recruiting pamphlet issued in 1951[27] states that women were eligible if they had 30 hours' solo; by April 1952 the standard expected had been reduced and volunteers were required only to be the holder of a PPL.[28]

In July 1952 Home Command decreed that WRAFVR pilots might

Plt Off Jean Lennox Bird.

be eligible for the award of the full RAF pilots badge after passing flying and ground tests at a Flying Training Command station.[29] The past record or experience of such a pilot would not be considered: she would have to pass the same tests as a male pupil at an FTS. RAF history was made two months later, on 20 September, when Pilot Officer Jean Lennox Bird became the first woman to be awarded an RAF flying badge, in a ceremony at No 15 RFS, Redhill. At the time she had been a pilot for some 20 years, with 3,000 hours on 90 types and was an instructor with a Senior Commercial Pilot's Licence. It is quite possible that she had more experience than some of the instructors at the FTS where she took her tests! The award of 'wings' was to be provisional until 'productive flying' had been carried out – a condition that also applied to male pilots. Productive flying was defined by Home Command as piloting of transport or communications aircraft, or ferrying. At this time 31 officers appeared in the WRAFVR General Duties Branch section of the Air Force List. The future of WRAFVR pilots became less certain a few months later, when the results were published of a review of requirements for reserve aircrew: the maximum age for aircrew candidates, of either sex, was reduced to 25 and in December it was announced that individuals would be granted a maximum extension of service of two years from the end of their current engagement.

A report in *The Aeroplane* in February 1953 stated that the WRAFVR (Flying) Branch had 58 flying members, 13 of whom had qualified for the Preliminary Flying Badge (PFB).[30] The requirement for the PFB was 110 hours, dual and solo, including night, formation and instrument flying, with ground examinations and a flying test with the unit's Chief Flying Instructor. The report suggested that a large proportion of these badges were held by ex-ATA pilots, although the majority of Reservists were PPL-holders. Six months later, the rundown of the Branch was accelerating: a letter dated 25th

September 1953, in the Jean Bird Archive, states 'The closing down of this section of the Reserve is part and parcel of the many changes in reserve aircrew policy: […] To do what you ask, would be to extend the life of an organisation which we had decided has no value in our conception of things to come.'[31] The RAF now had 'to stop the training of large numbers of male Reserve pilots, many of them incomparably more experienced and skilled than the young women now in the WRAFVR Pilot Section.' The Air Force List of April 1954 shows the branch at its numerical peak, with 31 officers – one flying officer, 27 pilot officers and three acting pilot officers. In that month it was announced by Home Command that it was necessary to confine flying resources to the refresher training of young men with recent experience on modern operational types, and that the remaining seven Reserve Flying Schools would close by mid-June 1955.[32] A year after this announcement only 13 officers were listed, and the branch made its final appearance in the Air Force List of January 1957.

In its brief existence the WRAFVR (Flying) Branch had 39 officers, and probably no more than 70 members of all ranks. A large proportion of the officers seem to have been former ATA pilots, no doubt as a result of the requirement being initially set at 100 hours solo. It seems likely that most of the members of the branch did little productive flying, although Jean Bird's logbooks record many hours as a staff pilot at No 15 RFS, mainly flying 'FCU'' sorties (presumably co-operation flights for Fighter Control Units) in Oxfords.[33] Although the branch received regular publicity – some seemingly inspired by the 'novelty' of women flying in the RAF – it evidently failed to attract sufficient members, even when the experience required of recruits was lowered.

An article in *The Aeroplane* seems to sum up the fate of the branch: 'When one considers the publicity that once attended the woman pilot, it is remarkable how successfully these VR pilots have lost their identity in serving their country.

Notes:

1 RAFM AC77/23/404; 'Why not a women's air force too?' in the *Daily Mail*, 14 October 1937.

2 Curtis, Lettice; *The forgotten pilots* (Henley-on-Thames, Foulis, 1971) p12.

3 TNA AVIA 27/1; Paper by Gerard d'Erlanger; 17 August 1939.

4 Curtis, p3.

[5] TNA AVIA 2/1621; 'Men who object to women pilots' in the *News Chronicle*, 15 January 1940.
[6] TNA AVIA 27/1. One of the replies in the file requests that the transfer of ACW D T Souter be delayed, as she was working at a radar station on the south coast. In due course Souter joined the ATA and later, as Jackie Moggridge, gained RAF 'wings' in the WRAFVR.
[7] TNA AIR2/6092.
[8] TNA ADM 1/13992; letter to the MAP, 3 February 1943.
[9] TNA AIR2/6092; 8 June 1943.
[10] *Ibid*. Note of a meeting with Sir Wilfrid Freeman 30 June 1943.
[11] TNA AIR8/793; Freeman to Portal, 26 December 1943. 'Sutton' was a reference to AMP, Air Mshl Sir Bertine Sutton.
[12] *Ibid*; FC/C 1402/5.
[13] *Ibid*; Letter to Secretary of State for Air, 12 January 1944.
[14] TNA AIR19/331; Minute dated 13 January 1944.
[15] TNA AIR6/83; Air Council Memoranda 1(47).
[16] Hansard Column 106 17 March 1947 downloaded via http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1947/mar/17/air-estimates-1947-48 4 September 2017.
[17] TNA AIR2/9798; Minutes of the Committee on the Policy for the manning of the Post War RAF.
[18] TNA AIR6/76; Air Council Standing Committee Conclusions 6(47).
[19] TNA AIR8/793; Note by VCAS, Air Council Standing Committee 6(47), 2 June 1947.
[20] TNA AIR6/78; Air Council Meeting 15(49).
[21] TNA AIR8/793; 17 February 1950.
[22] TNA AIR6/98; Air Council meeting AC(54)57, 2 December 1954.
[23] TNA AIR8/793; Air Ministry Pamphlet 236 *Notes for the information of candidates for employment on the WAAF/VR List(Flying)*.
[24] *Flight*; 16 October 1947, p456.
[25] Reserve Command letter RC/6664/PS 29 November 1948.
[26] *Air Reserve Gazette*, November 1949, p345.
[27] RAFM T836341 INF.141. *The answers to your questions about the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve*.
[28] Air Ministry Pamphlet 199(W).
[29] RAFM AC73/10/98. Home Command letter HC/6710/P dated 23 July 1952, cited in HC/6844/P.15 *Award of full flying badge – WRAFVR pilots*, 8 October 1952.
[30] *The Aeroplane* 6 February 1953, p165.
[31] RAFM AC73/10/98. Letter from the Office of the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, 25 September 1953.
[32] RAFM AC/73/10/98 HC/6858/P.15. *Memorandum explaining how members of the aircrew reserve are affected by recent changes in Reserve aircrew policy*.
[33] RAFM AC73/10/18 & 19.

REGULAR SERVICEWOMEN: THE PATH TO COMBATANT STATUS

Gp Capt Kathleen Sherit

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Introduction[1]

'Dodging a hail of bullets, we released the balloon from the tail guy [...] As the aircraft came round for a second attack, it hit the balloon cable and crashed.'[2] This was balloon operator Jeanie Galloway's recollection of an incident at Bristol in 1944. Attributing the downing of an aircraft solely to collision with a balloon cable was sometimes problematic as anti-aircraft artillery or fighter aircraft could also make the claim. However, risks endured by balloon crews were well documented:

> 'Corporal Lilian Ellis was in charge of a balloon site in South Wales during a night raid in May 1943. […] Bombs were falling all around. Corporal Ellis ordered everybody to take shelter while she completed the operation [order] […] Just then a bomb fell a few feet away, killing three airwomen and wounding four, including Corporal Ellis. In spite of her injuries, she insisted on the other members of her crew receiving attention first. She was awarded the British Empire Medal for her gallantry.'[3]

In 1941, Air Mshl Gossage (AOC Balloon Command) initially opposed employing airwomen. Amongst other reasons, he argued that they could not take on guard duty, nor could they fulfil the obligation that fell to airmen to assist the military authorities by taking up arms to repel an invasion. Wanting to save on airmen, the Air Council took

WAAF Aircrafthand/Balloon Operators wrestling their charge.

a more relaxed view of the former. Airwomen were given truncheons and whistles rather than rifles. On the latter, the War Office was simply informed that it could no longer count on help from certain balloon sites.[4] At the peak, more than 1,000 barrage balloons were operated by all-female crews.[5] Despite the potential to bring down enemy aircraft, acceptance of risk of becoming a casualty and the occasional recognition of gallantry, these women were not regarded as combatants or as being employed in combat roles. Their work fell into a group described as 'borderline trades' when it came to distinguishing between what was combat, and therefore closed to airwomen, and what was not.[6]

When regular service was introduced for women in February 1949, the Air Ministry adopted a policy of integration. Women joined the RAF – the term 'Women's Royal Air Force' (WRAF) was an administrative label, not an organisation as the wartime Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) had been. The policy of employing more than one woman to replace a man in certain trades (as had been the case on balloon squadrons) was abandoned. In regular service, in primary duties, airwomen and airmen were interchangeable. The

distinction between men and women came about through women's designation as non-combatants. Not only did this mean exclusion from overtly combat roles, but it also hindered the appointment of women to posts where additional duties (such as guarding) or war role (such as taking up arms to repel an enemy) implied the need to employ airmen.

Having described the opening of flying roles in an earlier paper,[7] what follows addresses the route to combatant status for ground-based women. It examines the non-combatant principle that determined the shape of regular service and then moves on to explain how combatant status came about in the late 1970s, the introduction of small arms training for women and the implications for women's careers.

The Non-Combatant Principle

The Second World War left some inconsistency when it came to the status of servicewomen. The Royal Warrant of 1938, which founded women's auxiliary services for the Army and the RAF, stated that women were to be employed in non-combatant roles. In April 1941, the Army's Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force were declared to be part of the armed forces of the Crown. Subsequently, under the terms of The Amendment to the National Service Act (1941), servicewomen could use lethal weapons if they agreed, in writing, but were still regarded as non-combatants. The Air Council clarified that airwomen would 'not be trained in the use of firearms or other lethal weapons, or be employed in any trade which involv[*ed*] combatant duties.' However, it acknowledged that there was 'no absolute distinction between combatant duties and non-combatant.'[8]

Doing whatever it took to win the war was one thing but, for peacetime, service policymakers reverted to a more cautious approach. The War Office took the lead on the question of arming servicewomen. In 1948, a draft paper supported by Maj Gen McCandlish (Director of Personnel Army) suggested that the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) could be trained for self-defence. Legal advice was explicit that nothing in UK or international law dictated that women were non-combatants – this was only a matter of British policy. The law did not define 'combatant duty'. Senior Controller Mary Tyrwhitt (Director ATS and subsequently

Brig Mary Tyrwhitt.

WRAC in the rank of brigadier) was clear that women should be trained in small arms. They were soldiers and should be an asset in war and not seen as a liability needing to be found a safe place away from an enemy or in need of protection by male colleagues. Tyrwhitt asserted that, 'In these days when the enemy may be largely uncivilised, I feel that most women would rather put their trust in their own skill with a rifle than in the finer feelings of an invading army.'[9]

Maj Gen Richard Hull (Director of Staff Duties at the War Office, and later to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff) disagreed. In his mind:

> 'The WRAC should neither be armed nor trained in the use of arms. [*I*]t would be psychologically unsound and an expensive waste of equipment, ammunition and training time to train women in the use of personal arms. The fact that "little Olga" is trained to kill and prides herself on the number of notches cut on her revolver butt is no reason why we, too, should cry "Annie get your gun". It is still the soldier's duty to protect his womenfolk whatever they are wearing. Even in these days when war means total war let us at least retain that degree of chivalry.'[10]

Hull clearly identified members of the WRAC primarily as women, not as military personnel. Perhaps he did not observe the inconsistency in his views, asserting that training the WRAC was unsound and a waste of resources, but acknowledging the competence of Soviet female soldiers.

Not much is known about the views of the Air Ministry in 1948. Gp Capt Jackman from the Directorate of Personnel Services represented it at the War Office meeting. He said the question had not yet been considered. He could not say what future policy might be but

that the 'Air Ministry had no intention of introducing compulsory weapon training for the WRAF at present.'[11] This reflected the position of the previous Secretary of State, Philip Noel-Baker. In a letter in 1947 to his War Office counterpart, he recorded his view that he hoped women would never have combatant status.[12]

The RAF's attitude towards weapons training and defence duties was also problematic for men employed in ground-based trades. From 1937 to June 1940, most airmen trained only to drill with weapons, not to fire them. With the threat of invasion, airmen were then expected to use small arms to supplement forces that guarded airfields. Post-war, training all airmen in ground combat proved contentious because of the cost of ammunition and diversion of men from their normal duty. This was of particular concern in highly skilled trades, such as engineering, where the priority was to employ men in their primary role. A policy of 2 hours' training per week, introduced in 1946, was not sustained. It was replaced by a policy of up to 48 hours' training per annum in 1951.[13] This commitment was what marked out airmen as different from airwomen who were not trained to use weapons.

'Non-combatant' policy, however subsequent generations of policymakers chose to interpret it, and despite exceptions that were made when convenient, became the foundation stone of women's regular service, embodied in the Queen's Regulations for the RAF.[14] It governed the number of women that could be recruited, roles, postings, promotion prospects to the most senior commissioned and non-commissioned ranks, pay, pensions and status in the eyes of male colleagues.

Combatant Status

Combatant status was clarified in international law in additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions agreed in the 1970s. The text stated that, with the exception of medical personnel and chaplains, *all* members of armed forces were combatants. A definition was provided: combatants had the right to take part in hostilities.[15] Britain signed the Protocols in December 1977.[16] This encouraged the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to declare the WRAC as a combatant corps and to bring the Women's Royal Naval Service under the Naval Discipline Act. Airwomen were now technically combatants.

Although combatant status was conceded, combat roles were not. The MOD had its next argument against the expansion of women's employment already prepared through its negotiation of exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Forestalling any potential move to include the armed forces in the scope of the Anti-Discrimination Bill, the MOD sent a paper on roles of servicewomen to Lord Royle, Chairman of the House of Lords committee overseeing preparation of legislation. It set out its case against extending women's employment on the basis of the short period of women's service compared with men's, public opinion being against women in combat roles, the harsh nature of field conditions, women's lack of physical strength, cost inefficiency and assumed problems in maintaining morale and discipline in combat units if women were present. The key claim was that combat was men's work – not women's.[17] The paper made insufficient distinction between the Services and, with an emphasis on field deployments, presented an army-centric position. It failed to do justice to the integrated pattern of employment in the RAF.

Lord Royle's committee accepted the MOD's position and the armed forces were exempted from the resulting Act's employment clauses. Combat roles were described as having a genuine occupational requirement for men to be employed.[18] Exemption being based on combat as men's work meant that subsequent widening of women's roles had to be defined as 'not combat', whatever the failings in logic that that implied. It was feared that concession of the word 'combat' would undermine the exemption and might result in an inability to exclude women from any role. The question of arming servicewomen provided the first test of this new climate.

Small Arms Training

Air Commodore Joy Tamblin, Director of the WRAF, was frustrated by women's exclusion from weapons' training. She thought it was an excuse to limit women's opportunities. Speaking in 2009, she recollected that:

> 'I found that there were some posts, where women, particularly women officers, would have been perfectly capable of holding a particular appointment – but if perhaps in an isolated posting or there was a great concern at the time that

Air Cdre Joy Tamblin – Director of the WRAF 1976-1980

> they might have been insurgencies in the country and perhaps a station would be targeted, everyone was expected to be able to defend themselves. But the idea was, of course, that [*if*] a woman couldn't defend herself, then she couldn't have a particular post, in which, in all other respects, she was quite suitable. That seemed to me not quite the right thing at all.
>
> Then the discussion went on about arming women. I remember going to one station in Cyprus – a rather isolated place – where I felt a very forward looking, very forward thinking [*Commanding Officer*] had allowed his senior WRAF officer to be armed – it was not strictly permissible in those days. He just taught her how to use a weapon and that was that. I thought, 'What a sensible chap.'[19]

Joy Tamblin first joined the armed forces in 1943 aged 17½, choosing the Auxiliary Territorial Service. She was posted to Bletchley Park. Inspired by working with female graduates, she went to university after the war. She joined the RAF in July 1951, preferring it to the Army because she thought it gave women more opportunity to progress. This optimism was tempered by experience where bosses opposed her appointment to their staff, even before they met her and could judge her professional competence:

> 'I can remember I went to Germany as an education officer and my boss very kindly told me when I first arrived that he had wanted a real education officer in his section – not *me* – a man. That was an unfortunate start – but there you are. Later, [*after*

> *transferring to the Secretarial Branch*], I became an accountant officer and I was posted to Steamer Point in Aden [*where I*] was the junior accountant officer. I was told afterwards that [*my boss*] had fought tooth and nail not to have me go there because I was a woman. But he was overruled, and I went.'[20]

Despite these experiences of individual attempts at obstruction, Joy Tamblin made the most of the opportunities on offer. She was one of the early female officers to attend Staff College and she went on to become the first female Command Accountant, serving at Strike Command from 1974 to 1976.

Promoted to air commodore, Joy Tamblin was appointed as the Director of the WRAF in 1976, a post she held until she retired in 1980. When it came to women's terms and conditions of service and fields of employment, the role was advisory. The incumbent did not 'direct' policy on women. Effectiveness in the job depended on the ability to influence thinking, encouraging those with authority to act. Tamblin was given an insight into what could be achieved through her participation in NATO's Committee on Women's Services. There she learned about developments in women's roles, particularly in the American forces. Aware that most NATO countries permitted women to be armed, she tackled the British ban. She recollected that some Station Commanders believed security and guard duties 'fell very heavily on the men because the women couldn't do armed duties.'[21] During visits to Coltishall, Waddington and Boulmer, Tamblin urged senior officers to raise the issue with their superiors at Headquarters.[22]

Change was in the interest of Station Commanders. Stations were tested against their war roles and the career prospects of Commanding Officers depended on the outcome of such evaluations. However, peacetime establishments were lower than those planned for war. Operating at a level below war establishment, flexibility was further hindered by airwomen not being available for armed duties. A letter to HQ Strike Command from Boulmer, an air defence station, exposed the anomalies in women's participation in hostilities. Women were employed in fighter control work and so were responsible for 'fighting the tactical air defence battle and for ordering fighters to shoot at and destroy enemy aircraft.'[23] Supporting arming, senior (male) officers at Boulmer thought that, 'There appear[*ed*] to be little moral difference

between giving an order to kill and carrying out the killing […] the effect of a female Sector Controller ordering a wing of fighter [*aircraft*] or a SAM section to engage [*the enemy was*] infinitely greater than the damage that [*could*] be done by the same individual using a sub-machine gun.'[24]

In April 1978, the Air Member for Personnel's department sought views on arming of women.[25] In response, Air Cdre Reed-Purvis (Director of Security) offered three categories of combat: offensive action, in which personnel would seek and destroy the enemy; defensive action, where weapons would be used from prepared positions near the place of work; and self-defence actions, in which the individual would react to being confronted by an enemy. Of these, he accepted that women could undertake the third task but not the first two. He argued that, as it was anticipated that not all airmen would be capable of operating effectively in action, '. . . it was unrealistic to imagine that all airwomen could be expected to react as combatants when under fire. To plan otherwise in peace would be to court disaster in war.'[26] He thought that the most that airwomen could be expected to do was to act in self-defence. Surprisingly, given his views on airwomen's capabilities, he added that they could undertake armed guard duty.[27] Air Cdre Parkinson (Director of Training) refuted a description of armed guards as 'non-combatants' saying, 'we need[*ed*] to be completely honest in this matter.'[28] He argued that if the intention was to improve operational effectiveness then 'armed women [*would*] be combatants in the same way that all male RAF personnel already [*were*].'[29]

Air Mshl Sir John Gingell (Air Member for Personnel) favoured arming women and in November 1978 he took his recommendation to the Air Force Board. In support, he cited shortages of personnel, a difficult recruiting climate and attitudes towards sex discrimination. He thought commanders would be willing to accept more women if they could be armed. He quoted the new Protocols to the Geneva Conventions and he produced evidence that arming servicewomen was commonplace in NATO and Commonwealth forces. Keen to distance itself from the post-Sex Discrimination Act equality lobby, the Air Force Board saw the proposal 'not [as] a matter of "women's lib" but of practical advantage.'[30] Although concerned about possible adverse public opinion, it agreed women should be armed to '[*defend*]

themselves, others and Service property' on a trial basis.[31]

Implementation and Implications

With the trials underway from 1979, Frances Pym (Secretary of State) feared 'strong and vociferous opposition' from the public.[32] However, such evidence as there was of public opinion pointed more towards indifference, or surprise that women were not already armed. Only ten letters were sent to the Prime Minister and these were of divided opinion.[33] Ian McDonald in the public relations office was not optimistic of stirring interest as 'the Press regard[*ed*] the issue as stale and the public never seem to have caught on at all.'[34] The Parliamentary response had also been low key.[35] Air Chf Mshl Sir Michael Beetham (Chief of the Air Staff) thought this lack of interest was good news, as full implementation could therefore proceed unhindered.[36]

After these successful trials, small arms training was introduced, initially on a voluntary basis as this change in commitment could not be imposed on those already serving. Women were not clear about the implications of this change to their conditions of service, resulting in fewer women volunteering than anticipated. Female officers and senior NCOs were urged to lead by example. This voluntary phase was further complicated in the RAF's operational command because of the outbreak of the Falklands War in April 1982. Resources could not be easily diverted to the initial weapons' training of airwomen.[37] Following this stuttering start, compulsory training for all female recruits was introduced from 1 April 1984.[38]

One immediate consequence of arming was a pay increase for all servicewomen, whether or not they took up weapons training. The mechanism for paying women less than men was enshrined in a supplement to basic pay, known as the 'X-factor'. This was an addition to pay in recognition of the extra commitments made by service personnel compared with civilian employment. One of the key factors in men receiving a higher X-factor than women was their liability to take up arms if the need arose. With some servicewomen now sharing that commitment, the MOD put forward a case for more pay to the Armed Force Pay Review Body (AFPRB). In 1982 servicewomen's X-factor was increased from 5% to 7.5% of basic pay. Men's rate remained 10%.[39] In acceding, the AFPRB was careful

Gp Capt Joan Hopkins as OC Neatishead in 1982.

to avoid overstating women's new responsibilities, saying that women were 'not trained to undertake a combat role.'[40]

With women in the RAF now able to fulfil war roles on the same basis as male colleagues, a barrier to employment was removed. Female officers could run station administration, including the associated war role of taking charge of the defence of the station. In 1982, Gp Capt Joan Hopkins took command of RAF Neatishead, Strike Command's control centre for the air space of southern Britain and its sea approaches.[41] In the non-commissioned ranks the trades of WRAF Administration, previously responsible for women's accommodation, welfare and discipline, and RAF Administration, responsible for station guardrooms, were merged in 1984. This led to the appointment of Jenny Winspear as the first female Station Warrant Officer.[42]

The new flexibility was most apparent in 1988 when the MOD grew concerned about the reducing pool of young people entering the work force. While the Army and the Navy established lengthy reviews of how they employed servicewomen, Air Mshl Sir Laurence Jones (Air Member for Personnel) simply informed his Air Force Board colleagues in a short memorandum that he had increased the quota for female recruits to ground-based trades from the then prevailing 7% quota to 10%.[43]

Conclusion

Establishing regular service for women in 1949, the Service Ministries chose to describe women as non-combatants, although it was known at the time that nothing in law prevented women from being combatants. The decision was not contentious. Although Mary Tyrwhitt pressed for members of the WRAC to be trained in the use of

The whole nine yards. Armed with both rifle and pistol, Sgt Karen Swallow, an RAF member of the Military Stabilisation Support Team, in Helmand, on a week-long anti-IED operation with No 42 Cdo in 2011. (LCpl Daniel Wulz, Crown Copyright/MOD)

small arms, the idea was rejected as a matter of principle (this was what communist countries did and was not appropriate to a western nation) and practicalities (lack of weapons, ammunition, cost and time).

By the 1970s, with the Geneva Convention explicitly stating that *all* members of the armed forces were combatant and had a right to

take part in hostilities, the easy exclusion of women from roles on the grounds that they were not combatant had to be abandoned. For the majority of the RAF, small arms training and the obligation to undertake armed guard duty was what differentiated airmen's work from airwomen's. It was this limitation on airwomen's employment that led to Station Commanders manipulating establishments, favouring men over women.

Air Cdre Joy Tamblin was instrumental in the development of policy on small arms training. Recognising the need, and inspired by what she observed in allied nations, she used her influence when visiting stations to encourage a lobby for change. Although the Director of Security was reluctant, the Air Force Board was ready to make this concession. There were gains from greater use of personnel at a time of over-stretch, without the need to increase station establishments. By careful definition of guarding as a defensive role, the extension of airwomen's roles was said not to imply that they filled combat roles. Nevertheless, acceptance of airwomen as combatants meant that full integration in ground-based roles was achieved.

As a consequence of the policy, more women could be recruited, more postings were opened, pay and hence pensions increased (though not to full equality) and the status of airwomen improved as they took their share of guard duties. Although aircrew roles were yet to be addressed, this was a necessary preliminary step that eliminated an important objection to women's wider employment.

Notes:

[1] This article draws on my comparative account of servicewomen's combatant status – Sherit, Kathleen; 'Combatant Status and Small Arms Training: Developments in Servicewomen's Employment' in *British Journal for Military History*, Vol 3, No 1, 2016.

[2] Escott, Beryl E; *Women in Air Force Blue: The Story of Women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the Present Day* (Patrick Stephens, Wellingborough; 1989) p162.

[3] AHB WRAF/WAAF Miscellaneous papers, The WAAF in Balloon Command, not dated.

[4] TNA AIR2/4710; correspondence 1941.

[5] AHB *op cit*.

[6] Private Papers of Dame Felicity Peake: Box 1, Air Ministry letter, 16 March 1942. Torpedo-men (*sic*) and armourers were also described as borderline. Airwomen were

not permitted in the trades of parachute & cable operator, armoured car crew, motor-boat crew or ground gunner.

[7] Sherit, Kathleen; 'Flying Roles for Women in the RAF' in *Royal Air Force Historical Society Journal* No 63, 2016, pp53-73.

[8] Private Papers of Dame Felicity Peake: Box 1, Air Ministry letter, 16 March 1942.

[9] TNA WO 32/13173, correspondence, Apr 1948-Nov 1948 including Tyrwhitt to Adjutant General, 22 April 1948.

[10] TNA WO 32/13689, Hull to McCandlish, 14 June 1949.

[11] TNA WO 32/13173, Minute to Brigadier Adjutant General Co-ordination, 28 May 1948 and Minutes of Meeting on Defensive Role of WRAC in War, 8 November 1948.

[12] TNA WO 32/13160, Secretary of State Air to Secretary of State War, 31 March 1947. This letter was in the context of women officers' authority under disciplinary codes being adopted for regular service.

[13] TNA AIR20/6531, Future of the RAF Regiment, 1 December 1945 and AIR6/80, Air Council Conclusions, April 1951.

[14] TNA AIR10/5614, Queen's Regulation number 877.

[15] www.icrc.org, Article 43 to Protocol I to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, dated 8 June 1977, accessed 18 July 2007.

[16] TNA DEFE 24/1301, Brief for Secretary of State's meeting with the Swiss Defence Minister, March 1978.

[17] Parliamentary Archive: ROY 1/3, House of Lords Select Committee, Anti-Discrimination (No 2) Bill, memorandum by the Ministry of Defence, October 1972.

[18] Parliamentary Archive: HL/PO/PU/4/212, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, clause 85.

[19] Air Cdre Tamblin, interviewed by author, 26 May 2009, transcript p2.

[20] *Ibid*, p13.

[21] *Ibid*, p3.

[22] TNA DEFE 71/31, Gp Capt Mackintosh to Air Commodore Tamblin, 1 November 1977.

[23] TNA DEFE 71/226, Annex B to Draft Air Force Board Paper for Air Member for Personnel, 6 September 1978.

[24] Ibid.

[25] TNA DEFE 71/31, Arming of WRAF Personnel, Mr West (Head of S10 Air), 21 April 1978.

[26] TNA DEFE 71/226, Director of Security, 25 May 1978.

[27] *Ibid*.

[28] *Ibid*, Director Training (Ground), 17 August 1978.

[29] *Ibid*, Director Training (Ground), 2 November 1978.

[30] TNA: DEFE 71/31, Air Force Board Paper, Arming of WRAF Personnel and Extract from Air Force Board Conclusions, 9 November 1978.

[31] *Ibid*.

[32] AHB: ID3/110/21, VCDS (Personnel &Logistics) to Secretary of State, 5 June 1980.

[33] *Ibid*, Vice Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel and Logistics) to Secretary of State, 5 June 1980.
[34] *Ibid*, Arming of Servicewomen, McDonald to PS/Secretary of State, 4 July 1980.
[35] *Ibid*, Arming of Servicewomen, Vice Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel and Logistics) to Secretary of State, 5 June 1980.
[36] *Ibid*, handwritten note appended to McDonald's letter of 4 July 1980.
[37] *Ibid*, Arming of WRAF Personnel, Note by Air Member for Personnel, 30 September 1983.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] *AFPRB Eleventh Report*, Cmnd. 8549, (London: HMSO, 1982), p8. A differential continued to be justified, on the grounds that other terms of service for women were more favourable than those of men.
[40] *Ibid*, p8.
[41] *RAF News*, 19 November-2 December 1982 issue, p1.
[42] Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue*, p261.
[43] AHB ID6/1006, Force Mix - Ground Airwomen Element, 30 August 1988.

MY TIME IN THE RAF

Air Cdre Cynthia Fowler

Air Cdre Fowler enlisted in 1964 and had reached the rank of sergeant before being commissioned into the Secretarial Branch of the WRAF in 1969. She served in a variety of administrative and recruiting posts, including stints at Coningsby, Rheindahlen, Glasgow and Cosford followed by more senior appointments at the MOD and High Wycombe. She commanded RAF Uxbridge 1991-94, and her final tour, as a one-star, was at Cranwell as Director of Recruiting and Selection. Since leaving the RAF in 2000, she has, among her many other activities, been involved with four Service charities.

I joined (enlisted in) the WRAF in 1964. I chose the RAF because it was integrated and a meritocracy – and because I had always wanted to. I had seen a marching band when I was about five years old and I was determined to march behind one myself. Leaving school, my reasons were far more serious than a marching band, of course. Throughout the 1950s and '60s there were few working opportunities for young women. Nursing, teaching and banking were the obvious options for my qualifications, but none of these interested me, so off I went to the nearest RAF Careers Office, much to the disgust of my school, and my father. Both were to change their minds later.

I had been educated at Fulneck Girls School, a Moravian boarding school near Pudsey which, apart from giving me a sound education and good academic qualifications, taught me to care for others and, more importantly, self-discipline. But it was RAF basic training that represented the start of my 'University of Life.'

I did my basic training at Spitalgate, just south of Grantham. It was a World War II airfield on top of a hill, said to be the highest point going eastwards until the Urals. The winds were cold, and temperatures even colder in December.

We were taught drill and smartness in everything – uniform, civilian clothes, bedspaces, drawers and wardrobes. We also learned to care for others. Because I was to take up a management trade

Cpl Fowler in 1965.

(WRAF Admin) and would be a corporal in six months, I was tested as Recruit Leader, so I had twelve other girls to look after in our barr ack room – six beds each side of a large room. The girl in the next bed casually said one day that she thought she might be pregnant. Abortion was illegal in those days, and the attempts to solve the problem made by the individual and/or backstreet abortionists often resulted in death. When this girl told us what was happening, it was already affecting her health and I felt that I had to do something. So I told the corporal in charge of us. She was regarded as a bit of a dragon, but she just said 'Leave it to me' and shortly after that the girl's problem was solved properly by a civilian medical practitioner.

There were lighter moments too. In those days we wore shirts with stiff detached collars, fastened by studs. We persevered with these things but, on our passing out parade, one girl's back collar stud broke and the collar shot up the back of their head and knocked her hat off!

After SpitaIgate I did my trade training and was then stationed at St Athan from where I was detached to RAF Muharraq, an airfield on a small island, just north of Bahrain. At the time we were having trouble in both Aden and Saudi Arabia. I flew to Aden several times, stopping off at desert airfields for refuelling and to retrieve some equipment before we withdrew from the whole area. The Middle Eastern potentates wanted the oil and, of course, the profits which, so far as Bahrain was concerned, were managed in the 1960s, by BAPCO, the US-owned and operated Bahrain Petroleum Company.

As we approached Khormaksar (Aden), we were shot at by local Arabs on the mountainsides with ancient guns using tracer bullets, which is why we could see them. After landing, weapons trolleys loaded with 45-gallon oil drums filled with water, stacked one on top

of another, were driven alongside to absorb any explosions. This was because there were frequent bombings with Molotov cocktails made from soft drink cans. After drinking from one of these, only recently invented, cans we had to ensure that it was made unusable by bending it and puncturing the sides. At this stage, women in uniform were still non-combatants and we had to be escorted by armed servicemen. Despite the danger, it was an interesting place to be and I was grateful for the experience.

Shortly after my return from the Gulf, I was promoted to sergeant and posted to High Wycombe. Membership of the Sergeants Mess provided another learning experience. This stood me in good stead when I was commissioned 18 months later, because I knew how to treat SNCOs and WOs – in many ways the backbone of the Service – with respect.

In 1969, I went to the Officer Cadet Training Unit at Henlow. In those days we still had all-female flights, but we became mixed flights during those outdoor physical training exercises that needed muscle-power.

My first commissioned posting was to Coningsby, as Adjutant of No 228 OCU which was training pilots and navigators on the newly acquired Phantom. I would work with some of these men for the rest of my service. Subsequent postings included a couple of years in Germany followed by Scotland, persuading Glaswegians to join the RAF. Then to Sheffield to take over my first post previously always seen as a male preserve – OC a Careers Information Office.

Promoted to squadron leader in 1979, I got my first of four postings to MOD Main Building, in this instance in Public Relations. As a wing commander, I attended the Joint Service Defence College at Greenwich (another ‘first’ for the RAF). Learning about battle plans, military history and meeting and listening to lecturers as diverse as Enoch Powell and Ken Livingston, and many senior officers of all three Services, was exceedingly stimulating.

I was promoted to group captain in 1990, and I had always wanted to be promoted on merit, not because I was a woman. To be appointed to a specifically woman’s job disturbed me, but I got the posting I dreaded; I was to be Deputy Director of the Women's Royal Air Force (DDWRAF). Still, the pay was good, if not quite as good as a male group captain’s. By this time, the Services had negotiated the ‘X

factor', which gave extra money to men for being, at least potentially, combatants and for serving in unhealthy places. That too was soon to change. The Cold War was over; the Berlin Wall was down and the Services would have to reconfigure their fighting postures – the Government wanted a 'Peace Dividend.' This was 1990 and against this background many things were about to change in the RAF.

But, back to being DDWRAF. This department had first been established in 1918 and had been re-established in 1949. However, its duties were about to be diversified with all Service Welfare being taken under its wing in June 1990. One month later, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and took many servicemen and their families hostage. Drawn from all three Services, these men were on Loan Service, ie in foreign parts helping to train local forces and with governance. While several men were detained by the Iraqi army, others evaded capture but had to live in dangerous places, like lift shafts, drains and/or in disguise. Those taken prisoner were held in installations likely to be targets if the West attacked. Their families were also taken and often obliged to participate in unwanted publicity. Indeed, Saddam Hussein was filmed with one of the children sitting on his knee. All their personal possessions were lost and their future was uncertain.

With my colleagues from their respective MOD departments, a Royal Navy captain and an Army colonel, we set up a Tri-Service Welfare Team. A couple of months later, the families were released and repatriated. We met them regularly thereafter to determine their needs. Housing was found, medical services provided and, gradually, they were reimbursed for their personal losses. Just before Christmas, the men were released. Several needed medical help; others just got on and went back to work.

Early in 1991 my colleagues and I became the arbiters of welfare for all three Services when the US President, George H Bush, and Prime Minister John Major decided to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. Casualties and Prisoners of War became our bailiwick, as well as organising the return of our dead – for the first time in our history. It was a very sad task, which affected us all.

Later that year I received an appointment that I had never even dreamt of – Station Commander at RAF Uxbridge. Again, I was the first woman to have this prestigious appointment and, furthermore, I was single, which was unusual for a command appointment. I asked

my 2-star boss what he thought about this. He replied that I would have far fewer distractions than a married person and should just 'enjoy.'

Long before the military arrived, the estate had centred on a country house built by Count Schomberg in 1717 as a hunting lodge. Later it was occupied by Richard Cox, of Cox's and King's Bank, which would become the first RAF Paying Agents. The park was a delightful site. situated on the outskirts of Uxbridge and Hillingdon with the River Pinn running through the middle. Having been bought by the government in 1915, the site was initially used by the War Office to house wounded men brought back from France during WW I.

In December 1917 the RFC Armament School moved in to teach armourers and aircrew about bombs and machine guns – the firing ranges were still there in my time – I wonder if they still are today. In 1918 the unit was restyled the RAF Armament School, making Uxbridge one of the original RAF stations. From 1920, it became the RAF Depot which made Uxbridge the main entry point for inter-war recruits, including T E Lawrence who did his induction training there in August-November 1922 using the pseudonym Ross; he reappeared briefly in 1925, this time as Aircraftman Shaw.

Later on Douglas Bader convalesced in the RAF Hospital that was built between the wars. By 1940 HQ 11 Group was at Uxbridge, complete with an underground Operations Centre (known as 'the Bunker') which is still there today. But more of that anon.

In my time at Uxbridge, two of its resident units, the Royal Air Force Central Band and the Queen's Colour Squadron of the Royal Air Force, were responsible for all London-based ceremonial duties. Rehearsals for major national events were often held at Uxbridge, supporting personnel from other units being attached and accommodated for the duration. Indeed, an outline of the Royal Albert Hall was permanently painted on the parade ground (there is now one of these at Northolt. **Ed**.)

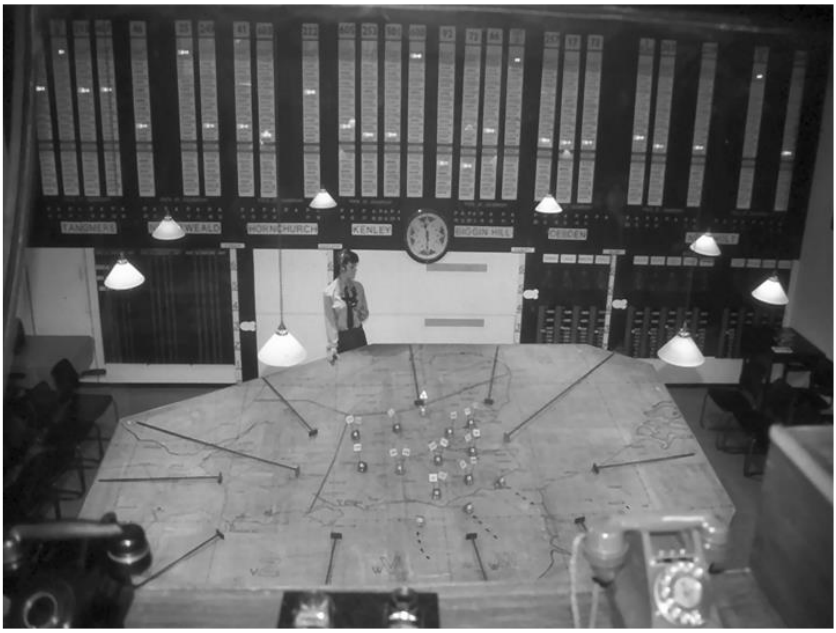
Other resident units included the RAF School of Music, the Military Air Traffic Organisation, which operated from Hillingdon House, and five USAF lodger units. However, our main job was to look after the 4,000 RAF personnel distributed world-wide on loan service, on attachment to the aviation industry and with foreign

Air Cdre Fowler inspecting a passing-out parade at Halton in 1995.

military and diplomatic services, and as the parent unit for all the RAF folk at the MOD. All of that made it a very busy station. My staff were superb and, 25 years later, I am still in touch with many of them.

I was very sad to leave Uxbridge but after 18 months I was promoted to air commodore and posted to HQ Personnel Command at Innsworth to command the RAF Education and Physical Education Services. Twelve months later I was asked which job I would like, by the Chief of the Air Staff, no less – Air Chf Mshl Sir Michael Graydon. Five days later I was appointed Director of Recruiting, Officer Selection and Initial Officer Training at Cranwell. In those days we were recruiting 4,000 people a year and overseeing this proved to be a demanding, seven-days-a-week, but nevertheless satisfying, job. Apart from my regular duties, I was invited to take many parades and attend Speech Days, one of which was at my own school, which made me very proud. Indeed, on my return to Fulneck I met my last form teacher, Miss Joan Mort, who had taught me history and Latin. She had been an inspiration and had anchored my lifetime love of history. After I left, she became Head Teacher and, to my great joy, she came to the Speech Day. It gave me great pleasure to be able to thank her for all she had done for me. Clearly, she too was proud of me, despite her doubts when I had left to join the RAF.

I retired at the end of 2000 and decided to travel a bit. Tibet, Cuba



Among her many post-RAF activities, Cynthia was Chairman of the Friends of the No 11 (Fighter) Group Operations Room and she is still their Honorary Secretary.

and Bhutan were among my more exotic early destinations, but I also did long-distance walking across the Pyrenees, the South Downs Way, Hadrian's Wall and elsewhere. In retirement I had taken on several other duties and committees, as many ex-officers do. It was good to keep in touch and to continue to try to help serving people in need of assistance.

But one summer's day I was asked if I would take over as Chairman of the Friends of the No 11 Group Operations Room at Uxbridge. Built in 1939, in four months, this underground facility was the main Battle of Britain operations centre, controlling the airspace over London and the South East. Commanded by AVM Keith Park, a New Zealander (who had served in WW I, initially as an artilleryman before transferring to the RFC and eventually commanding No 48 Sqn), the Bunker was regularly visited by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, along with King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. The

tension was enormous. Dunkirk was over, and Hitler thought he could invade the UK, but he needed to control the airspace and the ports and beaches of south east England. The workload of the aircrews and squadrons was enormous, as was the work of the personnel in the Bunker. It had initially been staffed exclusively by men but, when they were required for other duties, women and girls were brought in to replace them and they soon showed that they were, at least, as capable and competent as their male counterparts.

In 1985 the doors to the long-redundant underground Operations Centre were reopened and, over time, the whole building was restored to its state in 1940 and it is now open to the public.

The Battle of Britain lasted from 10 July to 31 October 1940. As he emerged from the bunker during a visit to Uxbridge on 16 August, Mr Churchill said to his Chief of Staff, Maj Gen Ismay, 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.' Four days later he would repeat those words, this time while addressing the House of Commons.

The Royal Air Force has been my life, and I am very proud to have served. But I am still taking up offers of demanding positions not normally 'for ladies.' In a few months' time I shall become Captain of my Golf Club, a club I joined when I was at Halton in 1982. Whilst at Uxbridge I became a Freeman of the City of London with the Patronage of the Worshipful Company of the Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers, who were associated with the RAF, courtesy of the CAS, Air Chf Mshl Sir Peter Harding. I am now on the Court, Finance and Charities and Fundraising Committees as well as the 400th Anniversary of our Charter from King William and Queen Mary.

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A PILOT'S STORY

Julie Gibson

Having graduated from London University with a BSc in Aeronautical Engineering, Julie was commissioned into the Engineer Branch in 1984. After tours at Wattisham, and Brawdy, she began flying training in 1990 to become the first active servicewoman to qualify as an RAF pilot. She subsequently flew Andovers and Hercules, latterly as a captain. She left the Service in 2001 and is currently an English language tutor for international army officers at the Defence Academy Shrivenham.

It is quite appropriate that I am delivering my presentation to the RAF Historical Society – in a museum – full of aviation relics! I often hear myself saying, 'I used to be *Flight Lieutenant* Gibson.' I have been asked to talk about my journey and experiences as the first female pilot in the RAF.

My great-grandfather was a major in the Royal Marine Artillery and served in France during the First World War. My grandfather served in the Army, joining during WW I. He was briefly in the Royal Flying Corps until it was discovered he was red-green colour blind and couldn't identify the signal flares, so he joined the Royal Artillery. This move undoubtedly saved his life. My mother and father both served in the Royal Navy. My mother as a WRNS Communicator and my father as a submarine captain. So with me joining the Royal Air Force, over four generations, my family have covered the defence of this country in the air, sea and land.

As a teenager I already knew I wanted to fly, and I got a summer holiday job to earn enough money to pay for a few flying lessons at Bodmin airfield. I had joined the Combined Cadet Force whilst in the 6th Form and during a cadet camp at RNAS Yeovilton I was treated to a couple of flights in an RN helicopter. I found the experience totally exhilarating but was devastated knowing that, at that time, female pilots were not allowed to serve in the British Armed Forces. I was also disappointed to find that, while male 6th Form students could apply for flying scholarships with the RAF, female students could not.

My school CCF report at the time read, ‘Julie is our first girl to be promoted to senior NCO status, and I congratulate her on this and on her enthusiasm. I am sorry she could not learn to fly’.

After leaving school I went to university to read Aeronautical Engineering, which turned out to be more about mathematics than aeroplanes, but it was a step in the right direction for me. In 1982 I was very fortunate to be awarded an Esso/Air League flying scholarship, which took me to my first solo – in a Cessna 150 at Bodmin.

Whilst at university I was constantly irked that the male students could be taught to fly on a University Air Squadron, with no commitment to join the RAF, whereas female students were not even eligible to join as flying cadets. I wrote several times to the squadron Boss and my local MP about how I felt that this was unfair to women. The reply I received from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces stated that;

> ‘We do not employ women as pilots in the regular service for two reasons. The first is that flying training is very expensive and pilots must serve as long as possible to maximise the return on the investment in their training. Female officers, on average, stay in service only about a third of the time of their male counterparts, mainly because of their right to leave on marriage and the requirement for them to do so on pregnancy. Unless these two conditions were withdrawn – which would, of course, create other problems – the employment of female pilots would not be cost-effective. The second, and principal, reason stems from Government policy that women should not be employed in combat roles. This alone would not prevent women from flying non-combat aircraft such as transports, but Royal Air Force flying training is geared to the production of fast-jet combat pilots, the biggest and most demanding role in the air force. In order to make use of the flying training they have already received all pilots for other roles are drawn from trainees who do not make the grade as fast-jet pilots. This is the most cost-effective means of producing aircrew in the numbers and types we need. To earmark certain roles for women from the beginning would make a very expensive task more expensive.’

Julie as an officer cadet at Cranwell in 1984.

The CO of the University of London Air Squadron wrote the following

> ‘Thank you for your letter dated 26 October 1981 in which you volunteered yourself for an experiment into female pilot membership of the University of London Air Squadron. Your letter raises a number of points. On the first point (that of female aptitude) I think any argument on this matter should have ended with Amy Johnson! It is not for any consideration of skill that we do not have female pilots but simply because we operate the same rules as the regular Service . . .’

Also in 1982 I was granted an exchange scholarship to spend a year at Syracuse University in the USA. Whilst in the States I saw, and met, women doing all kinds of jobs in aviation, including flying military aircraft in all roles. On return from the USA, in my final year at university, I was awarded an RAF Cadetship in the Engineering Branch. I was a pretty average student overall, but I did shine in one respect, and I received a letter from my Head of Department that read:

> ‘I write to congratulate you on achieving the highest mark in the 1984 Engineering Management examination. You were competing with 170 other final-year engineering students so this is an achievement of which you can feel proud. This is also a timely event, bearing in mind that 1984 is ‘Women into Science and Engineering Year.’

I entered Initial Officer Training in July 1984 at the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell. I then continued with my Engineering Officer training at Cranwell from December that year to March 1986. There I was able to experience flying in the Jet Provost – not in flying training, but by getting up early and catching a ride in the weather ship sortie.

My first posting as an engineer was as OC General Engineering Flight at RAF Wattisham. From there I went on to become the Junior

No 74 Sqn at Akrotiri during an APC – Julie at the right-hand end of the longest row.

Engineering Officer on No 74(F) Sqn, with the F-4J Phantom. The squadron motto, 'I Fear No Man', was often altered to 'I fear Norman' by the airmen there! Working on a fast jet squadron was a lot of fun, though in those days I would often be the only woman around. And, luckily, I did manage to get a supersonic back-seat flight in the Phantom!

My next job was as OC Armament Engineering Flight in Wales. Again, I managed to experience a few flights in the Hawk, and also the Hunter, at FRADU in Yeovilton. In 1988 I wrote a short paper on my dissatisfaction at the lower rate of X-factor for WRAF personnel. The X-factor was based on issues that included: combat duties; turbulence and long working hours; and marriage and pregnancy. I felt that the lower rate of X-factor paid to servicewomen was unreasonable for all WRAF personnel, but especially unfair for those women who had served on operational, front-line units and who had experienced disruption in their working hours. Female servicewomen finally achieved equal pay when I was in Ground School for my flying training, early in 1990.

On 20 June 1989 a signal arrived announcing a change in policy that now permitted the employment of female aircrew, previously confined to air loadmasters, to be broadened to include 25 pilots, 10 navigators, 8 AEOps and 4 Air Engineers. I still have a copy of this signal and it states:

> ‘Places will be allocated to females […] on merit in competition with male applicants. […] Terms of service for female pilots and navigators will be similar to those of men, however, there will be no right of PVR on or after marriage until amortisation of flying training has been achieved, normally 6 years after completion of OCU.’

My application for a branch change was typed up the same day as this signal was received, and was on my Station Commander’s desk the next morning. I didn’t want to waste any more time! After attending the Selection Board at Biggin Hill, I was thrilled when I received confirmation, on 7 September 1989, that I had been selected for pilot training. The letter included, ‘My congratulations to you on passing this first, very significant hurdle.’

Another letter of congratulation from the Chairman of the Air League, Air Mshl Sir Charles Ness, read:

> ‘We wish you joy in your new and exciting career: success I take for granted having heard, from more than one source, how well you have filled your current role as an engineer; driving aeroplanes will be a piece of cake after mending them.’

Another letter, from a personal friend, who was serving as an officer in the Royal Navy, at the time, reads:

> ‘. . . saw an article on your unique achievement, excellent news! We are still reeling from the shock of having WRNs at sea, although as with any change it will take the Senior Service twice as long to come to terms with it!’

Two female student pilots started Elementary Flying Training in 1989, but it was Flt Lt Sally Cox and I who started Basic Flying Training at Linton-on-Ouse in February 1990, with the Jet Provost. I progressed to RAF Finningley for my Advanced Flying Training on the Jetstream and was awarded the RAF flying badge (my ‘wings’!) on 14 June 1991, thus becoming the first female pilot in the Royal Air Force. It really was a dream come true!

I received some lovely letters at that time. For example, ‘Heartiest congratulations on your great achievement in gaining your wings! As an old RAF wartime survivor (just) and a firm believer in equal rights for woman I rejoice at your success!’ Another read:

Left, Julie, on the right, and Sally Cox at Linton-on-Ouse in 1990 and, right, receiving her 'wings' at Finningley on 14 June 1991.

> 'When I saw your picture I just had to write and congratulate you on gaining your wings with the RAF. I envy you very much and hope you will have an exciting career. I was a little girl before World War II and every plane to me was 'Amy Johnson' and I, too, wanted to fly when I grew up. However, girls were not encouraged to do such things and even joining the RAF after the war was out of the question as far as my parents were concerned. I never did learn to fly but I ride a motorbike instead.'

I was very pleased to read that last line and know she did achieve an exhilarating activity in her life after all. And from a friend:

> 'If you can stomach some advice from an old timer; the training now gets tougher though more enjoyable because you are closer to the final product, instrument rating never gets any easier and finally never disagree with someone's comments on your flying. Just say, 'You know Sir, you are absolutely right. I never thought of that.'

Driving an Andover from the right-hand seat.

Whilst waiting to start my first posting as a co-pilot with No 32 Sqn at RAF Northolt I took some leave and travelled to Australia. Here I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to fly with another female pilot – as part of the Australian Postal Service, delivering mail to remote farms and homesteads. My pilot expertly flew around the bush finding the obscure, tiny dirt strips to land on. I learnt a few things about navigation on that trip and the views were spectacular – the red earth was so different to the lush green of Britain.

At Northolt I learned to fly the HS748 Andover (CC2 & E3A variants) in the VIP communications role. The job included flying minor Royals, senior officers, civil servants and international dignitaries around Europe (the Andover would have struggled to cross the Atlantic). We also operated a regular shuttle between London and RAF Brüggen and Brussels. Some of the European cities I flew to with No 32 Sqn included: Venice, Rome, Berlin, Dusseldorf, Warsaw, Edinburgh, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Stavanger, Luxembourg, Heidelberg, Barcelona, Budapest, Bucharest, Kiev, Lvov, Moscow, St Petersburg, Arkhangelsk and Gorky/Nizhny Novgorod – not forgeting the Channel Islands and Shetland. Once or twice I was able to fly, with permission of course, over the Thames across London, getting a very close look at all those iconic buildings in our capital. There wasn't really any night flying in the VIP role as the passengers tended to keep quite civilised hours. And, of course, the food was excellent!

A high-level decision to scrap the Andover occurred just as I was finishing my co-pilot tour. Nothing to do with my landings, I assure you! – although they were often up for scrutiny. On one occasion some passengers told me, at the end of several shorts hops flown that

day, that they had been taking bets on which landings had been mine. They said that the last one had been particularly smooth and properly conducted, so it must have been the captain's. They never did believe that it had been mine!

At this stage I was also involved in a couple of trials to improve the uniform, flying clothing and general aircrew equipment following the introduction of more female pilots. A lot of the current equipment was sized to fit the male median form. Some of these trials had a humorous side to them. One letter, asking for volunteers to trial in-flight urination facilities for female aircrew, stated that, 'Any clinical photographs necessary would be of the relevant, affected area only. This should ensure anonymity'. Followed by, 'As there is a degree of urgency, could I have your replies by COP 30 Oct.'

In 1994 I converted onto the Lockheed C-130K Hercules at RAF Lyneham. On the Operational Conversion Unit I learnt to handle this beefy four-engine aircraft in more areas than just Europe and practised the procedures to fly across the Atlantic. The main roles of the Hercules were global resupply and movements, or tactical support. I joined LXX Sqn, which had a tactical role, as a co-pilot and was soon experiencing flying sixty tonnes of aircraft at low-level. I took part in air-dropping equipment from high level to very low level. It all made for an interesting day's work. There was no such thing as a typical load for the Hercules – we carried military personnel, paratroopers, wounded soldiers, premature babies, armaments, small helicopters, armoured vehicles, motorbikes, boats, engines (for aircraft and ships), mountain rescue dogs, medical supplies, tents, food, water and other humanitarian supplies. I even flew a Spitfire, as freight, back from the USA.

The Hercules is very much a crew aircraft – operated by a team consisting of Captain, Co-Pilot, Navigator, Engineer and Loadmaster. Often we would take a Ground Engineer too if flying on a long, overseas route. It was a joy to fly the workhorse of the RAF, often referred to as 'Fat Albert' – but she was always rather loud, hot and smelly, and rattled a lot. Friends were always curious about the facilities on board. For a toilet we had a fixed Elsan bucket that stood on a tiny platform right at the back of the aircraft near the ramp. There was a very loose tarpaulin to shield you from the passengers' view. I soon learnt to always carry my own clothes pegs to hold the curtain

Julie and a Hercules.

together, and developed a very intricate way of removing my one-piece flying suit whilst still firmly hanging on to a rail, in case of sudden turbulence! I often had to clamber over freight to reach the back of the aircraft, and sometimes had to quite literally walk on top of the legs of troops, so tightly packed in that they had no way of moving out of the way. Often a dozing passenger would be startled awake to find the female aircraft pilot standing on him – goodness knows what their first thoughts were!

After passing the Captain's Board in 1997 I returned to the Operational Conversion Unit for the Captain's Conversion Course. I was then posted to No 24 Sqn, which had a main role of route flying. My destinations were further afield than my Andover days and now included the USA, Canada (often Gander and Goose Bay), Hawaii, Cyprus, the Middle East, Ascension Island, Iceland, the Azores, Belize, Diego Garcia, the Seychelles and the Caribbean. I felt so privileged to have become an aircraft commander. A pilot never forgets that first time in the air when a crew member says, 'Captain, what are we going to do about . . .', and you look around and then realise the question was directed at you!

When I retired from the RAF after seventeen years of service (six as an engineer and eleven as a pilot), I had over 3,000 flying hours. It had been an incredibly rewarding career and to have fulfilled my dream after so many years of longing was a very satisfying experience.

My leaving reference from the RAF includes:

‘Flt Lt Gibson is a reliable Hercules Captain whose aircraft operation is assessed as above the average. Her general handling is wholly sound and her instrument flying equally smooth and accurate. Flt Lt Gibson has a relaxed style of cockpit management, controlling her crew using a firm but friendly manner. She is a hard-working and conscientious individual, who invariably puts Service requirements before her own. Flt Lt Gibson has achieved many firsts during her 17 years of service: the first female RAF Pilot and the first female Hercules Captain to name but two. Furthermore, she has been a fine and dedicated ambassador for female military and civilian pilots throughout the United Kingdom.’

Julie.

REFLECTIONS ON COMMAND

Gp Capt Sara Mackmin

Having studied Civil Engineering at Bristol, where she learned to fly on the UAS, Gp Capt Mackmin was commissioned in 1991. She has over 3,000 hours on helicopters, including operational service in the Balkans and Northern Ireland and 58 Search and Rescue missions. She is the most senior ranking female RAF aviator and is the first female RAF pilot to have commanded operational flying units at all ranks from squadron leader to group captain. She is currently Assistant Head of Strategy, Army Capability Air Manoeuvre, responsible for planning the future capability requirements for the Joint Helicopter Command from 2025 onwards.

President, Chairman, Sirs, Ma'ams, Ladies, Gentlemen, good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be with you here today and to talk about my personal experiences of command in the Royal Air Force. As one of the first of the current generation of female military aviators, I have generally avoided the limelight and media buzz associated with the many 'firsts for women' that I achieved throughout my career. My priority was on doing my job well. I also felt that if I was to play my part in helping establish women as a norm in the crewroom and cockpit then I needed to be 'just another pilot' and be accepted as part of the team. This would not happen if I were perceived to be a prima donna or someone who got special treatment because of my gender.

Despite missing out on featuring in *Marie Claire* when I became the first female Qualified Helicopter Instructor (QHI) – that's something I might just have done out of vanity but my desk officer knew me well, we had worked and flown together, he respected my approach and apparently told the pushy media rep, 'No, she's not being interviewed because she'll have my balls' – I felt justified in my approach when I heard male colleagues defend me. I recall two occasions when I was allocated a particularly choice task and an envious colleague was overheard to say, 'She's only got that because she's a girl' – the response from others was, 'No she's got that because she works hard and does the shitty jobs without complaining.'

When I was in charge of the Puma Operational Conversion Flight (OCF) in 2000-03, I was secretly delighted that the instructors were entirely comfortable with our female students being solid average – this seemed to prove that we had reached the stage where females no longer had to, whether a reality or perception, be better aviators to be considered equal. This was just 5 years after I had completed my Puma conversion training and proved how far the RAF had come integrating female aviators in a relatively short period.

And that brings me back to why I am here today, having avoided the limelight for so long. It is because it feels right to talk about my experiences now. Today women are part and parcel of the RAF's Whole Force, reaching the highest ranks in timeframes equivalent to that of their male counterparts. Women can serve in any branch or trade and have the same opportunities for a full and rewarding career as their male colleagues. The proportion of serving women is steadily increasing each year. I see talented men and women at all ranks working with each other as equals and all having to manage the conflicting pressures of family and work. From being the only women in meetings, I now find myself sitting in meetings where there is just the one man.

And it feels right because I am the most senior serving female military aviator, the most senior female RAF pilot and the first of this generation to have commanded at all ranks up to and including this one – all of these were commands that included, or were directly, operational. My reflections will be chronological, as I believe leadership is partly nature – the character we are born with – and partly nurture – learned and developed through experience. I leave it to the audience and readers to decide whether my views on command are peculiar to my sex, and I am interested in any feedback.

On reflecting on my experiences, I was intrigued to realise just how much certain experiences in my formative years had become threads running through my career. And how those threads are so closely aligned to Adair's triumvirate of People, Team and Task. So, starting at the beginning. Command in the military starts at officer training, we are taught about leading others, as well as about good 'followship'. On a helicopter, you have a crew so, even if the mission involves just your single aircraft, as the aircraft captain you are in command of people, juggling the priorities, setting the tasks for the

Sara, with one of No 33 Sqn's Pumas, on her initial field deployment, with the UN Protection Force in Bosnia, 1995.

crew, deciding what will happen and learning to accept inputs from others and taking them into consideration when determining courses of action.

As a junior aircraft captain, I quickly learned that while ultimately the buck stopped with me because I signed for the aircraft and the task, others in my crew had more or different experiences to me and may have seen something that I hadn't and thus had the right, or better, information than I to determine a good course of action.

In the summer of 2005, when I deployed as part of 33 Squadron's contribution to the UN (later NATO) Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia,[1] I was a junior first tourist pilot who had only recently qualified as Combat Ready. Therefore, I was crewed with more experienced pilots and spent much of my time in a non-handling pilot, or navigator, role. I quickly came to like flying with those who

[1] Soon after we arrived UNPRFOR became the NATO Force that led to the Dalton agreement.

Sara in the captain's (starboard) seat of one of No 33 Sqn's Pumas in Norway as part of NATO's annual ACE Mobile Force (AMF) arctic exercise.

actually listened to me, despite my relative inexperience. I remember clearly one very talented senior pilot who did not question my direction to 'overshoot' when we entered my first ever dust cloud and the dust obliterated our view of the landing site low on the approach to our base. He overshot and then explained what was happening and that he and the crewman still had visual references; he realised that I had never been exposed to or taught this kind of approach and that it was better to reset and explain the procedure than carry on. His response to the 'overshoot' command was standard procedure, but it meant more to me.

The lesson I learned was the importance of respecting the inputs of others. That this is not just about getting the job done safely and well but that listening, properly, to your colleagues and subordinates makes them feel that they genuinely have a voice that you respect and hear. Consequently, they are more willing to support you, to work with you, to work for you and to listen to you in return. While I learned this as a

junior pilot, and endeavoured to listen and respect my crew when I was the aircraft captain, this is something that more recently I have had to re-focus on because along the way, I lost the knack.

Another key formative experience during my first tour on 33 Squadron was flying in Norway – I was lucky to take part in two of the, then annual, NATO exercises of the Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force. Flying in the mountains in deep snow by day and night was extremely demanding, it is unforgiving if you get it wrong. I had several experiences where my skills were tested when the weather changed – as it is wont to do – and I had to dig deep and stay calm and focused to get the aircraft safely on the ground. On the second year in Norway, I returned from moving equipment from Bømoen, near Voss, further north to the Hjerkinn glacier where we were to spend the following week to discover that a fellow Puma Pilot – Chris Herd – had died the previous evening in an accident in southern Bavaria as a result of losing visual references during a landing in blowing snow. In conditions that he was not familiar with. This brought home to me the importance of the right training and discipline, as I had experienced in both my Norway deployments, and of the risks to life associated with this job – we were not immortal.

My second tour was on 230 Squadron in Northern Ireland. As on 33 Squadron, I soon found myself being given additional senior responsibilities early on. I became the shift programmer and after a year went to RAF Shawbury to train, and immediately return, as a QHI. It was during this tour that two key tenets of my leadership approach took root – both relate to PEOPLE. As the shift programmer, I aimed to spread the good deals so there was something for everyone. If someone got the dates off that they wanted one month, they went to the bottom of the 'personal requests' list until others had had their requests granted. By being fair, and also not chopping and changing the roster to do favours, we created stability and certainty that people liked. They could plan their lives and thus seemed more prepared to take their turn at the unpopular tasks. By ensuring that everyone got something they wanted at least once a year – be that a long family holiday or a development course – people felt they were recognised and rewarded.

I also stood up for the principle of 'give others responsibility and they will rise to the challenge'. If you don't, they will continue to act

like big schoolkids, especially bright people and aircrew. There is nothing worse than bored or underemployed aircrew. One example was when I argued for a junior pilot to take a small detachment of two aircraft to the mainland for a task – others thought him too irresponsible. We did send him and he rose to the challenge and proved himself a good leader who made sound decisions for his team when they experienced weather and aircraft issues. He later became a good instructor working for me on the Puma OCF. When I was OC 202 Squadron later on, I again gave several junior people with promise additional responsibility early on and saw them also go on to realise their potential. This was about parity of treatment, empowerment, trust and realising potential even though I didn't use those catchphrases at the time.

The next example is that of moral courage and integrity. When I was tasked to train a more senior and more experienced pilot in a discrete role, he put the aircraft and crew in a potentially dangerous situation, more than once, and I refused to sign him off as the aircraft captain in that particular role. I felt myself to be under a fair bit of pressure due to his seniority and position on the squadron. He questioned my ability as an instructor as I was still relatively inexperienced and technically still on probation – a B2. But I stood my ground. I had already been exposed to the loss of friends and colleagues in fatal aircraft incidents and I was not prepared to put my name to a qualification that could, in my view, place the lives of others in danger. It meant a lot to me when my squadron boss backed my judgement. It reinforced my self-belief in the importance of doing the right thing – of having that moral integrity especially when it comes to safety and risk to life. Shortly afterwards I upgraded to B1 with merit which was the icing on the cake in terms of validating my skills as an instructor.

In 2000, I was selected for promotion to squadron leader. At that time, I was back on 33 Squadron instructing on the Puma OCF. I remember the Squadron Commander, the then Wg Cdr, Baz North, calling me into his office. He congratulated me and told me that on 1 July I would be promoted and on 3 July, I would deploy to Kosovo to take command of the Joint Helicopter Force (JHF) on Op AGRICOLA.

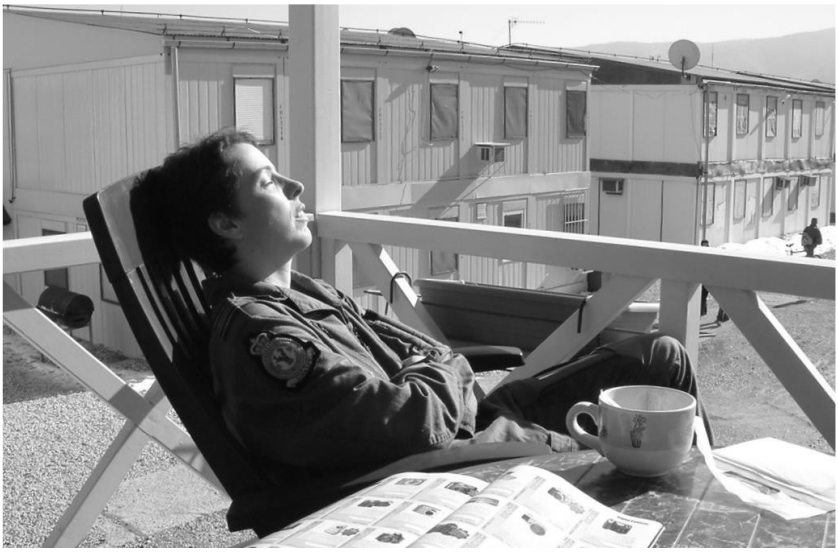
In Kosovo, I experienced a lot of challenges. I arrived to find that I

was not just Officer Commanding JHF (AGRICOLA) but within a week or so of arriving became the most senior British officer on Pristina Airfield, responsible for the whole British detachment and for interaction and liaison with the Russian and Italian generals. Both generals treated me with incredible respect and tolerance, despite my junior status . . . that was one occasion when being female just might have helped – especially with the Italian general! We also had numerous ongoing police investigations for fraud, theft and charges of GBH.

It was a steep learning curve about command and responsibility. I soon realised that the aircrew, my brothers in arms, did not contribute or participate in general JHF business. They seemed to expect everything to revolve around them and worse, did not seem prepared to back and support me, a fellow pilot. It was the non-fliers – the army signallers, the Ground Liaison Officer, the Ops Officers and the engineers who rallied around and supported this newly promoted squadron leader and helped her settle in and take decisions. That reinforced my sense of the value and role of the whole team.

My time on the OCF made me realise that change is not always necessary and can in fact be an embuggerance. We commanders flit in and out every 2 years but the rest of the staff stay put. The constant churn of commanders, all eager to make their mark and make things better, can be exhausting and distract from getting the core tasks done. You don't always need to change things simply because you happen to like them done a different way, or worse, to prove your worth in a 2-year tour. For example, on the OCF, I directed that we would change the way we tracked students' progress and manage sorties through a software programme that one of the staff had written. It took time and effort, yet gave us no additional benefit over the old way of doing it. I learned that sometimes it is better not to make changes just for change's sake – there needs to be a genuine requirement.

Towards the end of my second tour on 33 Squadron, when the remainder of the squadron deployed to the Gulf on what became Op TELIC, I was sent at short notice to command our NATO detachment in Bosnia at Banja Luka Metal Factory. This lies deep in the Bosnian mountains, and I arrived in winter with lots of snow and two junior crews. I was acutely aware of the risks and encountered a slightly disaffected, under-motivated team not helped by the fact that they



Sqn Ldr Mackmin catching 40 winks while commanding the Puma detachment working with the UN's Stabilisation Force (SFOR) based at the Banja Luka Metal Factory in 2003-04.

were not doing much flying. I was able to use my experience from earlier deployments and started thinking about the team as a whole. With a little bit of direction and focus we raised morale and gave the detachment a sense of purpose – to prepare for an external standards evaluation and to make the most of opportunities to develop our junior crews – and created a stronger team spirit.

The first, of two, key factors seemed to be preserving Sunday for 'rest and recuperation' for everyone, not just for the aircrew. This enabled people to do sport, to explore the local area or to simply catch up with personal admin before we all got together for a quiz and pizza in the evening. The second win for team spirit and morale was taking the detachment's non-flying members with us on training flights – this had the double bonus of developing the skills of junior crews while also getting people away from Banja Luka. Everyone, over a 6-week period, got a place on the training trips to Tuzla, and the chance to visit the American Base Exchange and Dunkin' Donuts shop. These two simple things created a great sense of achievement and mutual respect between aircrew and groundcrew. So we worked harder, flew

more than previous detachments, played harder and became a happy motivated team – a whole team.

After my tour as OC Puma OCF, I had three back-to-back staff tours. The first in the then Directorate of Equipment Capability (Air Littoral Manoeuvre) or DEC (ALM) in the Ministry of Defence (MOD), then a year at the Advanced Command and Staff College before further promotion to wing commander and a tour writing Defence Strategic Guidance (now called Direction) back in MOD. These tours were not about command but they were, I later realised, crucial periods in terms of the friends and work connections you make that will help again in later life.

My family doesn't do networking – I was brought up to have a very dim view of nepotistic 'old boys networks'. I was taught that reward and a sense of achievement comes from doing one's best and for doing the right things; that it's about 'what you know' not 'who you know' and that is how I approached my career in the RAF. I have come to realise that a strong network of colleagues and friends can be a good thing, that it is not necessarily nepotistic, but rather that strength borne of trust and credibility and shared knowledge gets stuff done. It is a force multiplier, an extension of the team concept. My network was reinforced through the RAF's Senior Leadership Development Programme for group captains. When I was OC 202 Squadron and, later, the Search and Rescue (SAR) Force Commander, I connected and reconnected with many colleagues across the length and breadth of the UK. Colleagues who proved key to progressing various work strands that they or I have been involved with and whose support and encouragement helped me when times were tough.

Going back a bit, in 2008, I was offered command of a squadron. To my shame, when I heard that it was a Search and Rescue Squadron – No 202 Squadron – I was shocked and disappointed. I really wanted, and had come to expect, that I would get a Support Helicopter (SH) unit. Much later my mum told me it was good for me to have been taken down a peg or two as I had been getting too big for my boots and, as usual, she was right. I'd had a pretty good run of it up until then; things had gone very well for me indeed. I'd got helicopters, which I really wanted, in a 'fast jet or bust' era, I'd got my first choice of aircraft type – Puma – and first choice of squadron – 33. I'd been on some great exercises and operations. I'd qualified as a QHI,

Sara, as OC 202 Sqn, in the right-hand seat of a Sea King.

upgraded at the earliest possible point to A2 and still been promoted 5 years after arriving on my first squadron and again to wing commander just 6 years later. When things did not go the way I'd wanted, the way I'd expected, when I did not get command of an SH unit, I had to sit back and take stock and take a good hard look at myself. It made me far more understanding of the majority of people serving in the RAF, not the minority cadre of those sliding smoothly up the greasy pole, but the majority, the ones who do all the real work. These are the individuals who are good but for whom promotion does not happen as quickly as it did for me, or who don't get the jobs they really want. It is easy to think you are being understanding if your career has run on rails, unless you experience disappointment you can't really understand how others might feel.

Commanding an SAR squadron was scary to begin with. SAR was different from anything I'd done before and here I was coming in at wing commander level. It was an unfamiliar role and I thought I had no credibility – until I discovered that many colleagues, students and friends from my Support Helicopter (SH) days on Puma now worked on my squadron. But I still had to build trust and credibility with those who didn't know me, who feared an 'SH takeover.' I found teams of

very capable people, all utterly committed, passionate even, to Search and Rescue. But this was also a community that felt it had been sold down the river by the senior RAF leadership for getting rid of military SAR – and here was an SH girl coming to tell them what to do. They felt unloved, undervalued and the small-town politics and dynamics of the small teams dispersed across the country meant mountains were regularly created out of molehills, often based on limited facts. We also had poor aircraft serviceability that was frustrating the aircrew and causing tension and fractures between them and the newly appointed contractors who were responsible for maintaining our aircraft; people had become complacent and resigned to this, simply making excuses about the aircraft. And finally, I felt that for all their expertise, and lack of serious incidents in recent history, we were not doing enough overland training, especially at night. As winter approached, I became extremely concerned about the apparent lack of snow landing techniques being taught. I was acutely aware of the risks of not getting this right from my early days on 33 Squadron in Norway and Chris Herd's fatal accident in Bavaria.

So I set about tackling these three issues. My squadron needed a big hug, along with a bit of a kick up the backside. My units were dispersed across the north of England, Scotland and Wales. It was tough – I worked a 70-90 hour week, including the driving, for two and a half years so that I could be with my people. Dispersed command is a huge challenge for communication – we used emails and we introduced a newsletter, but the key thing was me getting out to talk face-to-face with people and to hear and answer their questions in order to dispel destructive rumours and to reinforce positive messages. It took three months, in which I visited each of my units three times, for me to feel that I had met the majority of my shift workers, talked to them, listened to their concerns, responded to their questions and that my messages and intent were getting through. This built trust. We also worked on external perception through improving the way we spoke to visitors to ensure we came across as engaged with the wider Defence and RAF communities and not as an insular organisation only interested in ourselves.

It worked, we started to look to the future rather than dwelling on the demise of military SAR. More of the RAF Senior Leadership Team (SLT) started asking to come to 202 Squadron units and meet

with SAR operators. I sensed that my people started to feel more valued and respected by the SLT as a result of this face-to-face interaction, that they felt that the SLT had listened to them and recognised and respected the work that they did.

But this was not just about aircrew or even military personnel. Shortly before I arrived on SAR, the engineering support had been contractorised under an integrated operational support (or IOS) contract. This was working well at some units, but not at all at others, and poor aircraft availability was causing a lot of stress and frustration. I took time to engage with the engineers and non-aircrew at the units. I attended their shift handover briefs and went for cups of coffee in their crewrooms. If I took cakes for the aircrew, I took cakes for the groundcrew.

While the Force HQ put pressure on the Sea King Project Team and AgustaWestland (AW) to address shortcomings, which included changes to some of their senior staff, we focused on our *modus operandii* to do our bit to help improve availability. There was no golden bullet or single factor to resolve our aircraft availability and engineering issues – this was a case of the 'aggregation of marginal gains'.[2] I directed that aircraft were kept, if they landed serviceable with enough hours until the next servicing, on continuous charge to minimise disrupting the engineers when they were working on the other aircraft and I directed that the crews coming off shift were responsible for any known or planned air tests that day instead of this being the on-shift crew's responsibility, which provided a better guarantee that a crew would be available to fly as soon as an aircraft was ready for air test. We pushed back at the Force HQ demands for 'east coast shuffles' of aircraft every time a flight went off state due to having both its aircraft unserviceable – this only put pressure on the engineers and added additional work to already tired aircrew having to fly between the units in Yorkshire, Northumberland and Scotland and then drive the other way back – we took back ownership and took more pride in staying on state.

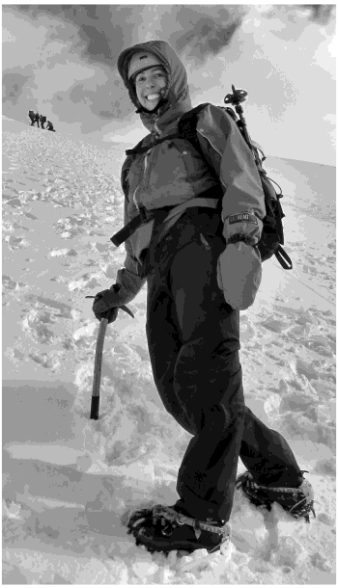
[2] The philosophy (an improvement of just 1% in every aspect of an activity will result in a greater overall improvement) employed by Clive Woodward, in his transformation of the England Rugby Team that ultimately led to their winning the World Cup in 2003.

We instigated regular planning meetings between aircrew and engineers. We included the engineering flight managers in our squadron execs meetings – enabling them to share good ideas and see how the other flights worked as well as making them feel part of the whole team. Simple changes, like putting the thank you letters – and SAR units get a lot of those – in a prominent place where everyone could see them, not just the aircrew, built a sense of connection for all to the SAR role. Aircraft availability and the team spirit improved at all units and by the time I was posted on we were averaging 98-100% across the whole of 202 Squadron in comparison to the 92% when I'd arrived (92% availability equated to each of the three flights being off state for 1 whole month a year.) We wrote one engineering team up for an RAF Commendation and individual technicians for safety awards – thereby recognising and rewarding the whole team.

My previous experience in mountains and snow caused me to be ultra-sensitive to the preparations for my first winter in command of 202 Squadron. I was extremely concerned about the techniques being taught for snow landings and was to be proved right. Luckily, we did not lose anyone but we came very close to a serious accident similar to the one in which Chris Herd died. I was equally concerned about the paucity of overland skill sets using Night Vision Goggles. I was like a dog with a bone over these two areas and we did change and improve the training in these areas, by the time I left the squadron, even the unbelievers were starting to buy into, and get the need for, this kind of training – and enjoy it. This was as much about fear of change as anything else but not changing could easily have cost us lives.

From 202 Squadron I went to work as Personal Staff Officer (PSO) to AVM Baz North, my old squadron boss, who was now the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (ACAS) in the Ministry of Defence. Another busy but highly enjoyable, challenging and rewarding post. In terms of command, my year working for Sir Baz reinforced a few valuable lessons. First, the importance of strong networks, secondly the positive effect that can be created by being patient and calm in public, however frustrated or annoyed you might feel, and thirdly of the importance of the personal touch – such as personal letters and saying 'thank you'.

After just one year, I was off back to the SAR Force, having been promoted to group captain. This was December 2012 and I took



Sara in the field, observing one of the Mountain Rescue Service teams on a winter skills training exercise.

command the following month.

The challenge of a dispersed command had just got bigger. In addition to 202 Squadron, I now had 22 Squadron's three operational flights at Wattisham, Chivenor and Valley plus the Sea King Operational Conversion Unit and the SAR crews who rotated through from the UK units to deliver SAR in the Falkland Islands. In addition, the four, soon to be three, Mountain Rescue Service (MRS) units and their HQ and the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC) at Kinloss all came under my command.

On top of this, I was responsible, after disaggregation of the capability areas from the MOD to the frontline commands, for the effective transition of SAR from the MOD to the DfT. As you can imagine, this announcement had hit the SAR Force hard. Moreover, they wanted to know what the future held for them. One of the first things I did was to communicate clearly my vision in terms of three priorities:

1. Continued successful delivery of SAR operations safely until point of transition.
2. To ensure that all SAR personnel felt valued and had future options open to them that worked for them.
3. To effect a seamless transition of the UK SAR Service to the DfT.

And then my execs and I set about delivering those three things. Apart from the work on the contract, little else had been put in place for drawdown of the military service, the future of its people and its equipment and infrastructure. PEOPLE were again the most important factor – this was a moral obligation, as well as the fact that without them we would fail to deliver the SAR service in the UK and the

Sara on a mountain top in Snowdonia on her last flight as the SAR Force Commander. (SAC Gina Edgecombe/MOD)

Falkland Islands. A flying service needs people to fly aircraft and maintainers to ensure there are aircraft to fly. Moreover, there was a risk that the uncertainty over people's futures and a deepfelt raw anger that some felt over the loss of military SAR, could have become a distraction that led to an accident – just about every other RAF aircraft fleet had experienced a serious or fatal accident in the rundown to being taken out of service and I was determined that this would not happen on SAR.

Therefore, it was crucial that my execs and I gained the trust and credibility of the whole SAR Force, helping them to believe that we would look after their futures so they could focus on the job in hand – the safe delivery of SAR for the UK and Falkland Islands. I spent considerable time on the road again to visit all 13 of my units – the priority being those who did not know me from my previous time with 202 Squadron. I took time to meet with the engineers, the military personnel and the civil servants, the aim being to listen, to understand and to build trust and confidence. I flew with all the units and went out for training sessions with the Mountain Rescue teams – for while the flying task was transferring to the DfT, the MRS would remain part of the RAF. The MRS personnel also needed to feel valued and to understand what the future held for them, especially as a previous planning round had decided to close one their units (at Leuchars) just as I arrived as the Force Commander.

As an executive, we conducted sessions to help us understand the

impact of the impending change on our people – much akin to the grief cycle – and how we could help them prepare for a different future. It was key that we only made promises we could keep and remained open and transparent about what we were doing and what was happening. The one thing we did promise is that we would endeavour to minimise disruption caused by the transition and to secure offers of posts in the military, for those who wished to remain, offers of posts that worked for them as individuals. But we reminded them that they would not get special treatment or be offered good jobs simply because of the change, it was up to them to ensure they were the kind of person the RAF, or Bristows, or any other employer wanted.

We worked with the DfT and once the contract award was announced, we were able to finalise the verbal 'gentlemen's agreement' that we had made with the Bristows SAR management team. We agreed that Bristows would not 'steal' our people in return for our assurance that the RAF and RN would release the people that Bristows wanted on mutually agreed dates that would not prejudice the current SAR delivery. We called this Managed Transition. This agreement gave the military personnel the security of knowing that they did not have to prematurely voluntarily retire from the military unless Bristow made them a job offer that they wished to accept. One of the Squadron Commanders worked tirelessly and closely with the RAF's personnel managers to secure good assignments for those staying in the military. Our earlier work changing external perceptions now came to fruition as we were able to quash concerns about, 'What do I do with them, now there is no SAR,' reminding people that the skill sets of an SAR operator were applicable to many other areas, especially roles that require people who can think on their feet, are flexible, agile, used to applying mission command, acting autonomously and making dynamic risk judgements – all skills that the Services were recognising had been denuded through the nature of ops in Afghanistan.

We worked closely with our AW operations and engineering managers to put pressure on their companies to look after their people, our engineers and other support staff, who could be, and were, leaving with just one month's notice. I often acted as the eyes, ears and mouthpiece for the AW managers as they were not able to travel out to

Gp Capt Mackmin as the SAR Force Commander, 2013-14

units as often as I could. Consequently, AW and Babcock put in place schemes, albeit limited, but still more than they might otherwise have done, that helped to attract good new engineers to replace the ones who did leave and retained sufficient old hands to sustain the aircraft through to the end. In fact the most frustrating area was managing the Civil Service whose Trade Union systems, that are there to protect the rights of employees, seemed designed to prevent us giving the same kind of early options to the civilian service as we were to the military and even contractors – all we could do was provide the best support we could, make sure that all that could be done was being done and that we were open and transparent, communicating regularly, even if nothing had changed, that still needed to be communicated so that people didn't feel something was being hidden from them or that nothing was being done on their behalf.

Ultimately, I wanted everyone to enjoy the time they had left on SAR, not to waste the time worrying about their next jobs, so that, at the point of transition, we could hand over each unit with our heads held high, with the reputation of 75 years of military SAR intact and military SAR personnel a hard act to follow. And while I had moved on by the time the transition was complete, the Force did exactly that.

So what would be my **key takeaways** in terms of command?

1 – **Have a Vision/Mission/Strategy** and communicate it early on. Communication really matters. Keep it simple. 3-5 core tenets will suffice to give the right understanding of your intent to create a sense of direction, purpose and create focus.

2 – **Understand yourself** – what makes you tick, what are your own strengths and weaknesses? Be honest with yourself. Beware of your own ego – none of us can do it, or know it, all. How do others actually react to you? – not how you want them to react. I am a chameleon according to SDI[3] – I like to find agreement to build consensus – this can make it difficult for others to place me, as I can be seen to change my mind, but it also builds teams and helps set conditions for long term sustainable success. I am also a natural teacher, I like to help people to realise their potential to improve, to do better; I think commanders have a duty to develop those under their command – we don't get given a bunch of perfect subordinates with all the skills they need. Stay true to yourself and what feels right – that's about integrity and moral courage – be prepared to make decisions on the best information you have, it will always be imperfect and there is no perfect decision. You will need inner resilience when times are tough but that doesn't mean command has to be lonely – the buck might stop with you but it's a team effort and your team can, and will, be there for you if they respect you and want to support you. Be yourself – anything else is a mask that cannot stay in place all the time and you will mess up your own mind. People value and respect authenticity even if they don't agree with you. Trust your own instinct, knowledge and skills – like when flying an approach on night vision goggles or in snow, there will come a point where you lose sight with your references, your markers guiding you on but you know you have set the aircraft up correctly and are on the right track so 'use the force' but continue to monitor as you may need to pull away/go around and reset if that temporary loss lasts that bit too long.

3 – and most importantly, **understand, respect and make your PEOPLE feel valued**. Adair's principles – Individual, Team, Task – continue to ring true. It was interesting for me to reflect on how much of what I did in command was about investing in that triumverate and particularly the people and team elements.

- Spend time earning support and trust, setting the foundations and conditions for change – the military can, and does, direct

[3] The 'Strength Deployment Inventory' system of evaluating personality characteristics and traits developed by Elias H Porter.

and there are times when that is needed and appropriate but unless there is immediate risk to life, it can be done less dictatorially. When the cat's away, the mice will play – on SAR you cannot be everywhere so the only way my intent would be carried through is if people bought into it and/or me.

- Value the wider team, whoever they are. This is not just about – though these are important – annual reports and the honours and awards system but simple things like when we moved the 'thank you' letters on SAR units from the aircrew crewrooms to a common area, the time that I took to have a cup of tea with the engineers or taking the ground crew on interesting training sorties with us in Bosnia. Like recognising what is important to a particular individual and helping make that happen for them.
- Listen. Spend time with people on their terms and listen. Really listen. If you feel something bubbling up inside that you want to say or contribute, make yourself stop, ask yourself why – what would be the added value or is it just to stick your ten penneth in? You don't need to say something to be respected.
- Don't make promises you can't keep, especially about the end point – it always changes.

So above all else in command, you are just the caretaker for that period and it is not all about you. It is about achieving the output or delivery, which is intrinsically linked to the people. It is about understanding them and doing right by them. If they trust you, if they buy into your vision – see their contribution as being worthwhile – and above all if you make them feel rewarded and valued then everything else falls into place. This is fundamental to successful delivery and to the kind of constructive changes needed to ensure long-term sustainable outputs and organisations. It is also why I disagree with the statement 'the loneliness of command' – yes, the buck does stop with you but it doesn't have to be lonely if you have that positive, constructive relationship with the people you are responsible for. Command is all about the people – it is frustrating, it is challenging and above all it is the most rewarding role in the world – especially if you link it to saving lives.

DAME HELEN GWYNNE-VAUGHAN: HER VISION FOR THE ROLE OF SERVICEWOMEN

Gp Capt Kathleen Sherit

The War Office, September 1918: 'Well, Mrs Gwynne-Vaughan, have you heard about the Air Force?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Are you pleased?'

'No, sir.'

'You surely don't think yourself indispensable to the Corps in France?'

'It hadn't occurred to me to think myself indispensable to the Air Force, sir.'[1]

Such was Helen Gwynne-Vaughan's recollection of her conversation with the Adjutant General when told that she was to transfer from Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) to be Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF).

As Richard Overy's account made clear, the early months of the Air Ministry were difficult as it struggled to shape an air force from component parts reluctantly surrendered by the War Office and the Admiralty.[2] The first Air Minister (Lord Rothermere) and the first Chief of the Air Staff (Hugh Trenchard) both resigned. The WRAF, formed on 1 April 1918 from women working with the Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Naval Air Service and the Women's Legion, was in a poor state. The Air Ministry sacked its first two choices to be the senior woman. Lady Gertrude Crawford went quietly, having squeezed an extra month's pay in lieu of notice from the finance department.[3] The Honourable Violet Douglas-Pennant, controversially dismissed at the end of August 1918, created a public furore that lasted for years.[4] In making its next selection, the Air Ministry could not afford a further failure. Rather than seeking a candidate from public life, as it had with Crawford and Douglas-Pennant, it turned to the War Office and asked for Helen Gwynne-Vaughan.[5]

Helen Gwynne-Vaughan (née Fraser) made a unique contribution to the women's Services from their inception in 1917 to the early years of World War II. This article explores her family life, her career and the transformative impact she had on the WRAF. It also examines the vison she developed for women's roles in the armed forces.

Early Life

Helen Fraser was born in January 1879 into a junior branch of a Scottish aristocratic family. Her father was in the Scots Guards and his brother (the heir to the title of Lord Saltoun) was a Grenadier Guard before he inherited an encumbered estate in Scotland. Her mother was a novelist whose family was of the gentry class. Helen was the elder of two sisters. Tragedy struck her family when her father contracted typhoid during a visit to Italy. He died when she was five years old. Three years later, her mother married Francis (Frank) Hay-Newton. Her step-father, formerly a captain in the Hussars, was a Queen's Messenger acting as a courier for the Foreign Office. He subsequently joined the Consular Service and postings to Corsica, Portugal, Stockholm and Algiers followed. Helen's upbringing fell to a nanny and then to a succession of governesses in the countries to which the family was posted. Although she did not enjoy a warm relationship with her step-father, he responded to her inquisitive mind by teaching her mathematics – an important intervention for her future.[6]

By the late 19th Century, formal education in well-to-do families had extended from sons to daughters. At the age of 15, Helen persuaded her mother to allow her to attend school. Initially, she went to a small boarding school in London, before being sent to a more intellectually demanding establishment – Cheltenham Ladies College – in 1895. The College set high academic standards and operated a strict code of discipline and appearance. Benefitting now from her step-father's coaching in mathematics, she relished the science subjects to which she was introduced. She formed an ambition to undertake laboratory work.

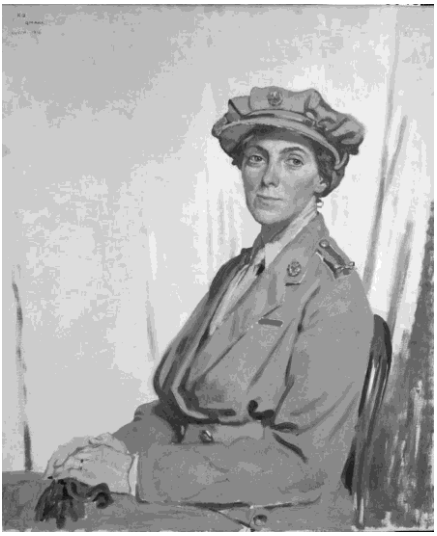
The formalities associated with her class intervened as she was obliged to enter society through the process of 'coming out' – a year of attending elite social events. Her first formal appearance, sponsored by her Fraser family, was at a ball in Aberdeen given by the Gordon Highlanders. According to her biographer, the social round, with its purpose of finding a suitable husband, did not appeal to the young Helen. Years spent abroad left her feeling disconnected from the Frasers and the norms that they represented. She wanted to make her own way in life through studying science, but the idea of a degree seemed ridiculous to her family. They adhered to the view, common at the time, that 'education spoilt a girl's chances of marriage.'[7]

Helen won the battle with her parents. She studied for and passed the entrance examination for Oxford University but turned down a place when she discovered that it did not award degrees to women. Instead she chose King's College London, attracted by the opportunity of studying zoology as a subsidiary subject alongside her main subject of botany. Her faith in London University's apparent commitment to a non-discriminatory policy was shaken when she was nearly denied a prize for coming top of her class in her second year. Although the University's authorities decided that she could be awarded the Carter Gold Medal, Helen resented the fact that the matter had needed any debate. She gained her Bachelor of Science degree in 1904 and her doctorate in 1907. She went into university work and married David Gwynne-Vaughan (a professor in botany) in 1911. Unusually for the times, she continued to follow her university career, a choice supported by her husband. Married life was cut short when her husband died of tuberculosis in September 1915.

Army Experience

Widowed and childless, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan saw it as her duty to make a contribution to the war effort. Her opportunity came when the War Office decided to create a women's corps to undertake support duties in France in order to free up soldiers for front line duties. Social background and who you knew determined appointments to the top jobs when the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later renamed the QMAAC) was set up early in 1917. Through her connections with the pre-war campaign for women's suffrage,[8] Helen was introduced to medical practitioner Mrs Chalmers Watson, the sister of two Army generals (Sir Eric and Sir Auckland Geddes). Mrs Watson was appointed to head up the Corps, working at the War Office in the Adjutant General's department. She suggested Helen Gwynne-Vaughan for the post in France. When interviewed by General Macready (the Adjutant General), it emerged that this former Gordon Highlander had been at her coming out ball. Socially, there was mutual understanding. In her memoir, Dame Helen believed that being of the Fraser family – the same class as regular Army officers – was important in her being appointed.[9]

Coming from university life, Gwynne-Vaughan was accustomed to a hierarchical environment. Those lower in status deferred to



A 1918 portrait, by William Orpen, of Helen Gwynne-Vaughan as 'The First Chief Controller, QMAAC in France. (IWM Art.IWMART3048)

professors, stood in their presence, made way in corridors and addressed them as 'sir'. She was accustomed to working with men and holding her own in discussion. Through voluntary work in London, she also had useful experience of dealing with the needs of ordinary women. She had a strong sense of women's ability to contribute and a wealth of experience of living abroad. She was an ideal candidate to take charge of this new concept – a corps of women in the Army, serving in the lines of communication in France.

Being in the Army, she needed a uniform – but none had been designed. On their own initiative, Helen and Mrs Chalmers Watson went to a fashionable Oxford Street store to order appropriate clothes. Having been told her rank was equivalent to a lieutenant colonel, that was the rank she put up – prematurely it turned out. Rank insignia were to mimic men's but not copy them. Roses and fleur-de-lis rather than crowns and pips were to be worn. Army ranks were not offered. Women were known as officials and forewomen, not officers and non-commissioned officers. To her dismay, saluting was not compulsory. Women were enrolled rather than enlisted into the Army. In France, they came under military law as camp followers not as soldiers.[10]

Appointed as a 'Chief Controller', Gwynne-Vaughan took up her post in France in March 1917. Her title represented a small victory. Originally promulgated as Chief Woman Controller, she did not want to sign letters with 'Woman' in the title. Thinking that the generals would not change their minds on what they would perceive as a trivial objection, she made her appeal that becoming known as Chief W.C. would be unfortunate. She won her argument.[11] Nor was she dismayed

by slights such as an officer remarking that his wife took no interest in the WAAC because she was ‘a truly feminine woman’, though she recognized the remark as representative of a commonly held view that those willing to serve with the Army lacked essential womanly traits.[12]

Gwynne-Vaughan threw herself into the task of creating an effective support corps of women. Drawing on procedures already used for soldiers, she organised her servicewomen’s work, accommodation, rations and facilities for off-duty time. She negotiated with the Adjutant General’s representative in France on rules for conduct and discipline. She set up a training school for her officials and forewomen covering practicalities of regulations, accommodation, pay procedures and record keeping. But she also included lectures on the military situation as part of her drive to create unity of purpose and *esprit de corps*.[13]

The acid test came in the spring of 1918, as the German offensive broke through allied lines. Gwynne-Vaughan resisted War Office plans to evacuate the women. Her stance was supported by the Signals Director who pleaded to keep them as they fulfilled a vital function operating communications’ equipment. The women stayed at their posts, gaining great credit. While the inevitable rumour mill stoked (unfounded) allegations of women only being in France to work in brothels and a hospital being needed to deal with those who became pregnant, Queen Mary saw fit to give her name to the Corps.[14]

Helen Gwynne-Vaughan was delighted with the recognition for the Corps and the more favourable press coverage that resulted from servicewomen’s resilience during the difficult months of the spring of 1918. The concept and practice of a women’s corps had not been universally welcomed in the press, by the public or by the Army. Gwynne-Vaughan, having been given the job of setting up a women’s army corps in France, did exactly that – copying as many standard Army practices as she could, sometimes to the dismay of male officers. Her enthusiasm for women’s military service was not always appreciated. But her own time in France ended abruptly as she was head-hunted to sort out the mess that the Air Ministry was making of the WRAF.

The Women’s Royal Air Force

In appointing Lady Gertrude Crawford, daughter of the Earl of

Sefton, as the Chief Superintendent of the WRAF, the Air Ministry quickly decided it had made a mistake. She accepted the job on 25 February 1918 and the Air Council confirmed Sir Godfrey Paine's (Master-General of Personnel – MGP) decision to dismiss her on 4 April.[15] He turned to Violet Markham for advice on a replacement. Markham was a well-respected figure – one of the 'great and the good' that Government departments turned to for advice. On 9 April she offered a list of potential candidates for the job. Of the Honourable Violet Douglas-Pennant, daughter of Lord Penrhyn, she noted her as 'very charming and tactful […] with much sound administrative capacity and experience'. She was working for the National Health Insurance Commission as its Commissioner for Wales. Markham went on to say that she would possibly be 'somewhat shy and retiring for this particular work' but suggested she 'would certainly not make trouble.'[16] Hardly a ringing endorsement and, indeed, wrong as she went on to create a considerable amount of trouble for the Air Ministry. Her remarks also leave open a question over what brief she received if 'not making trouble' was a recommendation. Markham's list was sent to Miss Durham at the Ministry of Labour for a second opinion. She favoured Douglas-Pennant, describing her as the strongest candidate in the list, 'very generally known and liked.'[17] Douglas-Pennant took up the post, now with the title 'Commandant', on 13 May 1918.

There was a fundamental problem with the way in which the WRAF was administered, as Violet Markham pointed out to Godfrey Paine. The Chief Superintendent did not have the same level of executive authority as that exercised by the senior women in the other Services. She was obliged to work through an officer on the Director of Manning's staff. Markham suggested that the senior woman should be able to deal with other departments at the Ministry 'without working through one or more layers of masculine control.'[18]

The officer that the Commandant worked through was Lieutenant Colonel Bersey. He was also somewhat inexperienced at staff work having joined the Army in 1914 and having been suddenly elevated to temporary rank to fill a post on the MGP's staff.[19] Bersey was responsible for organising accommodation, rations, training, movements, postings and records for the WRAF. Five of the twelve male officer posts in his department were vacant in early July 1918.[20]

The Commandant was expected to arrange recruitment, selection of officers, welfare, leave, promotion, medical boards, discharge and inspection. In practice, recruitment was undertaken by the Ministry of Labour for all the women's Services. Bersey's failure to provide an adequate training establishment for officers meant that, however well selection went, there was delay in processing candidates. She had responsibility without authority, a disastrous combination.

Douglas-Pennant's situation was made worse by the failure to transfer enough experienced officers to oversee women working at airfields around the country. Apparently, of nearly 6,800 women transferring from QMAAC, only 67 had officer status. The proportion was better from the WRNS, but still only 46 officers for 2,821 women.[21] Despite her best efforts, the WRAF had: insufficient accommodation to cope with recruitment from the civilian community; no uniforms for recruits so that women were working in their personal clothing; poor record keeping resulting in an inefficient pay system and promised bonuses that did not materialise. Not much of this list seemed to fall under Pennant's list of duties. However, by August 1918, the Minister of National Service was apparently unwilling to place more women with the WRAF until it was better organised.[22] The Air Council dismissed Douglas-Pennant without making plain the charges against her or giving her an opportunity to defend her actions. Nor did it examine where the problems actually lay. The incoming MGP, Sir Sefton Brancker, had the immediate task of sacking her and finding a replacement.[23] Bersey was also replaced – though not dismissed from the Army.[24]

The Air Council needed an experienced woman who would bring a sense of order. It turned to the War Office for help, asking for the officer who had so successfully led their women's corps in France for 18 months.[25] Helen Gwynne-Vaughan would have preferred to stay in France with the QMAAC but accepted as an order her appointment as head of the WRAF. She was able to build on some of the work that Douglas-Pennant had initiated, but she also came with ideas based on her experience in France. Asked by Brancker what she thought was needed, she asked for the introduction of RAF rank insignia so that people understood women's levels of authority. The equivalence between men and women's rank titles was set out in Air Ministry Weekly Orders and she requested that her title of Commandant be

As Master-General of Personnel, Sefton Brancker was generally supportive of Gwynne-Vaughan.

equated to the rank of brigadier general. She also asked for authority for women staff officers to write through normal RAF channels.[26] This was intended to stop the practice of a female staff officer writing with a set of instructions to WRAF officers at Area headquarters, leaving RAF officers in ignorance. All of these demands were agreed by Brancker who elevated her also to a position of a 'Director' on his staff. As such she attended meetings along with his other Directors and so became better informed.[27]

Gwynne-Vaughan did not win all her points. She wanted to use the term 'women of the RAF' rather than 'WRAF'. For her, that better reflected women's position in the Service. She also wanted saluting to be compulsory, not a matter of courtesy. She decried officers who returned a salute with a nod and a smile.[28] For her, slackness in saluting was indicative of slackness elsewhere. Brancker supported her in a paper to the Air Council but her ideas were rejected on the grounds (excuse?) that there would be implications for the Admiralty and the War Office if these changes were made.[29]

Finding a shortage of WRAF officers in her Air Ministry department and in Area headquarters around the country, she borrowed two senior women from the QMAAC and enrolled another from the Red Cross in France. She took part in all officer selection boards held in London and trained others to take part in boards held in other parts of the country. Once she had enough officers, she re-organised her department so that staff had clear responsibilities. She

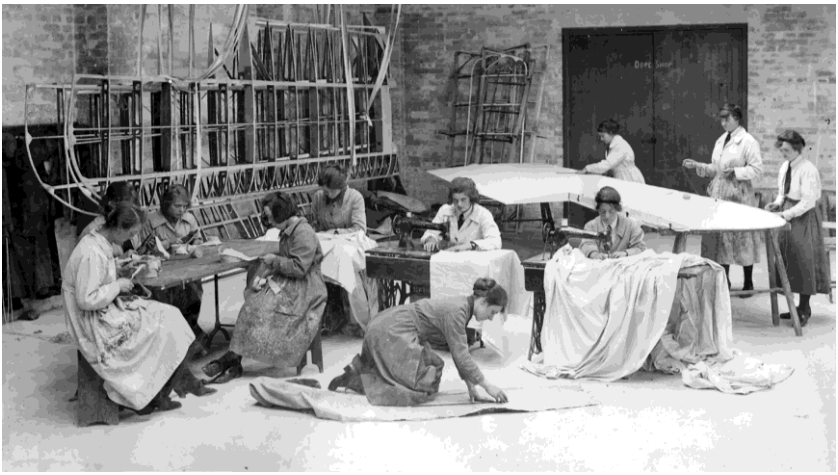
created five sub-branches: officer personnel; inspections; training; discipline and welfare; and other ranks.[30] She persuaded the MGP that quartermaster services could be undertaken through routine channels and, in her words, this 'soon put matters on a satisfactory basis.'[31] In December 1918, she proposed that male staff were no longer needed to run WRAF matters – her staff were perfectly capable of working directly with the relevant departments. The men's posts were disestablished.[32]

Gwynne-Vaughan made a point of visiting as many stations as she could, often flying. Indeed, she took flying lessons, but these were stopped when Brancker left office in January 1919.[33] She regarded the attitude of Station Commanders as crucial to the success of WRAF sections. On reflection, she divided stations into three categories: those where it was assumed that women were incapable of anything but routine work under guidance; others where ordinary coolness in an emergency was acclaimed as unanticipated courage; and those where a high standard of work and discipline was expected and attained.[34]

A Future for Women in Military Service

As the Armistice was signed, plans were already being discussed about the future structure of the RAF in peacetime. There was some expectation that women would remain a permanent part of the new Service. Perhaps as many as 10,000 women would be wanted, though this figure later reduced to 6,500.[35] Helen Gwynne-Vaughan contributed her ideas of a role for the WRAF. Women, she said, had proved better than men in domestic trades, as fabric workers and riggers. They were as good as men as clerks (especially shorthand and typing), at store keeping, painting and doping, and as telephone operators. They would do even better in peacetime because there would be time to train them properly.[36]

If women were to play a part in a regular Service, Gwynne-Vaughan wanted commissions for officers and enlistment for airwomen.[37] She loathed the lesser standing associated with women's enrolled status. It caused practical difficulties with discipline as offences sometimes had to be dealt with in civilian courts rather than through the system of military justice. She argued that civilian authorities could not be relied upon to make satisfactory rulings in connection with military offences. Enrolled status also adversely



Women had proved better than men at some trades; one of them was working with fabrics. (RAF Museum)

affected women's entitlement to sick leave, sick pay and health care that soldiers could claim.[38] Women were lost to the Services who might otherwise have recovered their health and returned to duty.

Gwynne-Vaughan gave a detailed critique of women's terms and conditions of service. For example, women were paid by reference to equivalent civilian work. They could receive more than airmen in some trades though the total value of emoluments was lower once benefits-in-kind were considered. But this was not understood by the rank and file and so caused resentment. Running two different systems of pay – one for men and a different one for women – caused unnecessary complexity She suggested that women should be paid like men – a daily rate based on their trade and rank – but lower rates than men. Here, she was adopting the standard practice of the day. But, she argued, women should have the same allowances in recognition that they might also have dependents.[39] She seemed to be thinking primarily of elderly parents but did not rule out the idea of women joining the Service after having children.

During the war, many women served on 'immobile' terms. These were women who lived at home and travelled daily to work at a nearby base. This saved on the need to construct accommodation. Immobile women were also paid at a different rate from those who

served on ‘mobile’ terms – willing to work where sent. For peacetime service, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan recommended that all women should be on mobile terms. She thought women should join between the ages of 18 and 28 and they should be eligible to serve until age 55. Initial engagement should be for a total of 12 years, with a minimum of three on active service.[40] She suggested that women should be allowed, but not compelled, to leave on marriage. Indeed, she saw the presence of some senior married women as being a useful presence among the young, single airwomen.[41]

Helen Gwynne-Vaughan as Commandant of the WRAF.

In February 1919, still awaiting a decision about the future of the WRAF, Gwynne-Vaughan set out advantages and limitations of keeping a cohort of servicewomen. Women, she argued, would increase the available manpower (*sic*) on mobilisation. If servicewomen were employed in peacetime, they would provide a trained nucleus around which expansion could take place, ensuring that the employment of women in a future war would be more effective. Women working in support trades such as stores, and clerical work would not be ‘combed out’ (as the expression was at the time) as men were for duty nearer the fighting. Thus, the rear areas would retain some experienced personnel who could train recruits. In certain trades where women worked in equivalent roles as civilians, they would maintain their skills as reservists and so be productive quickly if recalled for service. Women could be paid less than men and so would be good for the budget. Finally, she remarked that it would be good for the nation if women undertook military service and

acquired discipline and training. But she cautioned that women could not be employed in all trades – particularly those with heavy physical demands. Nor should any trade employ too great a proportion of women – she suggested a maximum of 50%. Some men would always be needed to go to postings in foreign theatres where it would be unacceptable to employ women. Also, women should not serve too close to enemy positions to avoid the risk of becoming prisoners.[42]

Gwynne-Vaughan returned to the subject of the contract that women signed on joining. She set out three options. First, women could be civilian subordinates. However, they could not then be obliged to go onto the reserve and could not be recalled if needed. As civilians, the authorities should not attempt to set down regulations dictating behaviour in off-duty time. They would be unenforceable. Alternatively, women could serve under special legislation, as they had done during the war when the Defence of the Realm Act was invoked. Or third, they could enlist and serve under the Air Force Act. The later was her clear preference.[43]

The decision to disband the WRAF was made in August 1919. Dame Helen, as she became that year in recognition of her wartime service, left on 4 December. Her parting shot, signed that day, was a lengthy memorandum to Brigadier General Francis Festing (Deputy MGP) in which she set out what needed to be remembered for the next time there was a major war. She returned to the themes of terms of service and the need for proper military status. She tackled the scares about morality – she was very pragmatic. She had no time for attempts to keep young men and women segregated. Far better to acknowledge that they would meet in off-duty time and to provide mixed recreational space. Otherwise, young people would behave surreptitiously and that would be bad for discipline. She remarked that in her time in France with the QMAAC, there were only three illegitimate pregnancies per 1,000 women and amongst the WRAF who served abroad after the Armistice, there was only one case from over 1,000 women.[44]

Gwynne-Vaughan wanted to minimise the differences in treatment between servicemen and women. Artificial differences should be avoided. She urged the adoption of the same terminology, the same disciplinary system, the same method of pay (though not equal pay), the same system of officers, non-commissioned officers and junior

ranks – with the same expectation of behaviour and treatment. She observed that:

> 'enrolled services accomplished their object owing to the good will of all concerned in spite of an unsatisfactory system [*original emphasis*] and that system, though often referred to as if designed to soften the severity of military service, by actually being unfair to women in respect of leave, pay, status, care of dependents, sickness, compensation for deterioration of health [*was*] against the best interests of the service.'[45]

She recommended that in a future emergency:

> 'The system already in use for enlistment, discipline and control of airmen be adopted and that some form of commission be given to women officers.'[46]

She signed off with her credentials:

> 'This recommendation is made in the interest of the Service and of the women concerned by the only officer who has held senior rank in the enrolled services from their first formation, and the only senior officer who has served both overseas and at home.'[47]

Later Life

After the war, Dame Helen returned to university work, but she retained her interest in servicewomen through Old Comrades Associations. As events in Europe deteriorated in the 1930s, along with other influential women, she lobbied for the re-introduction of women's auxiliary services. She helped to establish an unofficial voluntary scheme – the Women's Emergency Service – to train women for roles as officers.[48] She knew from experience that the absence of trained officers and non-commissioned officers had hampered the embryonic women's Services in 1917.

In 1938, the War Office reluctantly agreed to introduce an auxiliary corps for women, this time named the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS). At the request of the Air Ministry, it included some companies to support the RAF. The ATS absorbed the Women's Emergency Service, just as Helen Gwynne-Vaughan had hoped. She promptly set about running training courses for ATS officers. Just as

Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan in 1924. (National Portrait Gallery)

she had done in 1917, the 5½-day course included practical knowledge – record keeping, pay procedures, discipline, standard letters to act as templates for correspondence and, of course, drill. But the intention was also the indoctrination of the spirit and attitude sought amongst future leaders. Not compulsory, due to lack of funds, nevertheless more than 1,000 women attended before the outbreak of the war.[49]

As war became imminent, the War Office decided to appoint a full-time Director for the ATS. They asked Dame Helen to take the job which she did in July 1939, giving up her lecturer's post at Birkbeck College. So many of the lessons she had pointed out in 1919 had to be learned once more. On the outbreak of war, women volunteered in their thousands but there was a lack of uniforms, training, accommodation and jobs for them to do. Women were again enrolled rather than enlisted. Not being subject to military law, they could not be returned to their base if they absented themselves. Given the chaos of the early months of the war, women left in droves. Ten per cent of ATS women left in the first five months of 1940; the WAAF reported a loss of twenty-seven per cent of its recruits in its first nine months.[50] They took better paid jobs in industry. Although Gwynne-Vaughan lobbied for the ATS to be brought under military law to prevent this haemorrhage, the idea was rejected out of hand. Generals did not see women as military personnel in the same way that she did.

But the change of status did come, though it should not be attributed to her lobbying. To stem the loss of women to other employment, pave the way for women's conscription, operational

employment in anti-aircraft artillery roles and significant expansion of the women's Services, Parliament brought the ATS under the Army Act and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force under the Air Force Act in April 1941. Army and air force women were declared to be members of the armed forces of the Crown. Officers were given the King's commission. Helen Gwynne-Vaughan was forced to retire a few weeks later, the public reason being age.[51] In truth, the War Office did not believe she was the right person to oversee the expansion of the ATS. She could not present the required public image and, by then, she was perceived as a bad-tempered, prickly woman. She exerted control over staff work that created unnecessary delay – not trusting subordinates to get on with their jobs. But she retired with the King's commission – her aspiration fulfilled. Her ambitions for women to be offered regular, enlisted service came about after World War II when the Service Ministries acted upon lessons from both wars.

Conclusion

Helen Gwynne-Vaughan was a remarkable woman. She broke free from the norms of her position in society to become independent. She rejected Oxford University because it accepted women onto courses but did not confer degrees. She took her degree, completed a doctorate and became a university lecturer, publishing papers in her chosen field of botany and becoming Head of Department at Birkbeck College, London University. Without the outbreak of the Great War, this would have been her claim to fame – a pioneer of women working in science.

It is inconceivable that the Air Ministry would have chosen a man from civilian life to be Chief of the Air Staff. Senior officers transferred from the Royal Navy or the Army to take on the task of shaping the RAF. Yet in creating the WRAF, it ignored the few senior women who had gained some military experience in 1917, instead appointing a woman from the upper class to head this new organisation. Only after dismissing both Lady Gertrude Crawford and the Honourable Violet Douglas-Pennant did it seek help from the War Office, asking for Helen Gwynne-Vaughan.

Military service proved to be a calling for Helen Gwynne-Vaughan. She felt at home with the ethos of self-discipline, hierarchy and patriotic duty. She had an analytical brain and was quick to learn. Accustomed to working in an environment where women's very

presence was questioned, she was able to navigate the hostility often displayed towards servicewomen. She made herself a professional. She studied King's Regulations and Military Law and took flying lessons as Commandant WRAF. She made sure she knew something of the military situation and introduced lectures on it for her subordinates.

Gwynne-Vaughan could be expected to sort out the problems that she inherited in the WRAF. She came with a reputation of being a good organiser, having successfully led the Army's women's corps in France for 18 months. However, she did more than create an efficient and effective WRAF. She perceived that women could make a permanent contribution to the RAF, not just support for the duration of the war. Within months at the Air Ministry, she produced a template for women's regular service. She proposed that a women's component could provide a core around which expansion could take place in the event of a future major war – the very concept used in 1946 when justifying the creation of peacetime service for women. She backed that up with a detailed critique of terms and conditions of service. The essence of her argument was not to create difference where none was needed. The employment of servicewomen would be so much easier if they were treated in the same way as servicemen rather than having to deal with artificial barriers. As early as 1919 she argued for women to be 'RAF' rather than 'WRAF'. She was an early exponent of the integration of women into the Service.

There is no doubt that had her advice been accepted in 1919 on keeping servicewomen, or in the 1930s on the early introduction of an auxiliary for women, or in 1939 by enlisting rather than enrolling women, then the chaos of women's Services experienced in the early years of World War II would have been avoided. In December 1919, she left a template that foreshadowed the arguments in the period 1946-49 when the terms and conditions for women's regular service were negotiated. She saw further than most that women could contribute and how to make such participation efficient and effective.

Notes:

[1] Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1942), p67.

[2] Richard Overy, *The Birth of the RAF 1918* (Allen Lane, 2018).

[3] The National Archives [henceforward TNA]: AIR 2/11890, Payment Docket, 22 May 1918.
[4] Her dismissal was compared with France's Dreyfus Scandal by David Ockham, *The English Dreyfus Case*: *a Sidelight on the Winning of the War* privately published by the author in 1922. Douglas-Pennant's case was considered by a House of Lords committee and she produced a record of events published with the title *Under the Search-Light, a Record of a Great Scandal* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1922).
[5] TNA: AIR 2/11890, McAnally to Secretary at the War Office, 2 Sep 1918.
[6] Biographical information is drawn from Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 'Vaughan, Dame Helen Charlotte Isabella Gwynne-', Mary R S Creese, www.oxforddnb.com, accessed 6 Jan 2009 and Molly Izzard, *A Heroine in Her Time: A Life of Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan 1879-1967* (London: Macmillan, 1969).
[7] Izzard, p71.
[8] Helen Gwynne-Vaughan contributed to a London University group campaigning for votes for women, though she was not a leading exponent of the cause. She was a suffragist rather than part of a law-breaking suffragette group.
[9] Izzard, p131.
[10] Gwynne-Vaughan, pp16-7 and pp28-9.
[11] *Ibid*, p15.
[12] *Ibid*, p14.
[13] *Ibid*, pp62-3.
[14] *Ibid*, p56.
[15] TNA: AIR 6/16, Air Council, 4 Apr 1918.
[16] TNA: AIR 2/11890, Markham to Paine, 9 Apr 1918.
[17] *Ibid*, Durham to Bersey, 16 Apr 1918.
[18] TNA AIR 2/94/CW4382, Markham to Paine, 9 Apr 1918.
[19] Izzard, p185.
[20] TNA: AIR 2/11895, Bersey to MGP, 5 Jul 1918.
[21] From an account of her year in the WRAF provided by Gwynne-Vaughan to Brancker after the war, reproduced in Norman Macmillan, *Sefton Brancker* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1935), p437.
[22] Beryl Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue* (Wellingborough: Patrick Stevens Ltd, 1989), p78.
[23] TNA: AIR 2/11890, Douglas-Pennant to Brancker, 29 Aug 1918 referring to their meeting on 28 August.
[24] Izzard, p192.

[25] TNA: AIR 2/11890, Air Ministry to War Office, 2 Sep 1918.
[26] National Army Museum [henceforward NAM]: 1994-01-253-2068, Gwynne-Vaughan papers, unpublished memoir.
[27] Macmillan, p445.
[28] TNA: AIR 2/94/CW6787, Gwynne-Vaughan, 1 Oct 1918.
[29] *Ibid*, Air Council paper 8 Oct 1918 and record of meeting.
[30] TNA: AIR 2/11890, Draft Statement of Evidence for Treasury Solicitor.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] NAM:1994-01-253-2068, Gwynne-Vaughan papers, unpublished memoir.
[33] *Ibid*.
[34] Macmillan, p441.
[35] TNA: AIR 2/94/CW9740, Gwynne-Vaughan to Director of Personnel, 2 May 1919.
[36] *Ibid.* Gwynne-Vaughan to MGP, 21 Nov 1918.
[37] TNA: AIR 2/94/CW10218, Minute, Gwynne-Vaughan to Deputy MGP, 30 Jan 1919.
[38] TNA: AIR 2/94/CW9740. Gwynne-Vaughan to Deputy MGP, 1 Feb 1919.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid*. Gwynne-Vaughan to Director of Personnel, 4 Dec 1919.
[42] *Ibid.* Gwynne-Vaughan to Deputy MGP, 1 Feb 1919.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] *Ibid*, 4 Dec 1919.
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Gwynne-Vaughan, pp78-82.
[49] *Ibid.*, pp95-100.
[50] TNA: ADM 116/5102, Meeting with Judge Advocate General, 23 May 1940.
[51] Gwynne-Vaughan, p137.

THE RAF'S FIRST WOMAN PILOT?

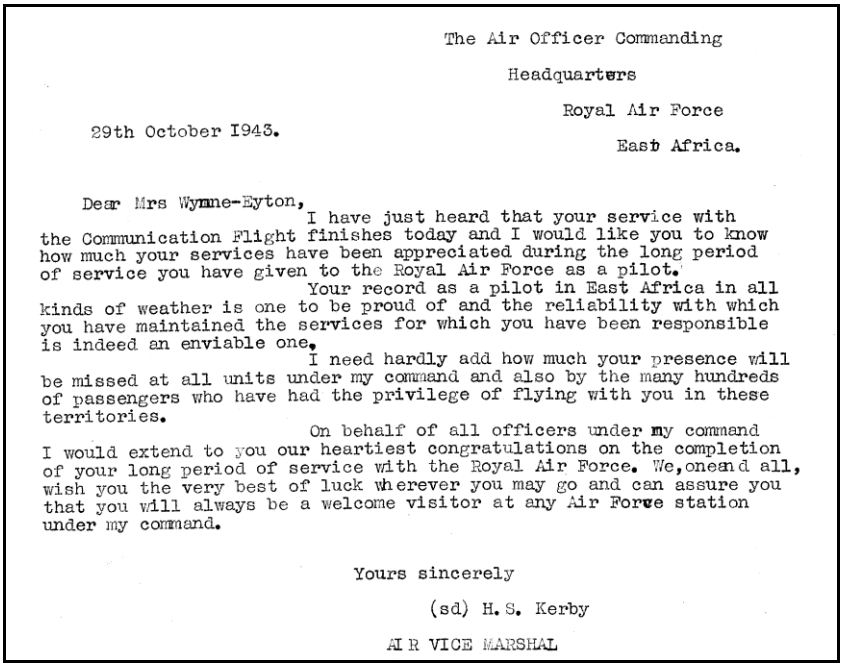
Peter Elliott

In 1988 the RAF Museum received a small collection of papers relating to Mrs Jane Christie-Miller, together with a terracotta bust. Much of the collection relates to her post-war life in Kenya, but it includes a few items dealing with her Second World War service. The most striking was a small photograph, in which she is wearing RAF uniform with pilot's wings. Further investigation revealed a complex story.

Helen Blandy-Jenkins, aka Jane and/or Jean Wynne-Eyton aka Jane Christie-Miller. (RAF Museum)

Born Helen Blandy-Jenkins in 1894[1], she married Stephen Silver in 1914, but the marriage apparently did not last long. In 1930 she learned to fly on a Gipsy Moth and shortly after obtaining her Royal Aero Club Certificate flew with her instructor, Captain Campbell, to Kenya, arriving in Nairobi on 20 October, some 17 days after leaving Heston.[2] In Kenya she married Wing Commander Sandy Wynne-Eyton, who had flown in the First World War and gone into civil aviation in Kenya.[3]

When war broke out in 1939, she reportedly joined the Kenya Auxiliary Air Force and flew as a communications pilot.[4] It may be that the lack of suitable uniform meant that she had to wear RAF kit. Intriguingly, a file in The National Archives contains a signal dated 12 September



The Air Officer Commanding

Headquarters

Royal Air Force

East Africa.

29th October 1943.

Dear Mrs Wynne-Eyton,

I have just heard that your service with the Communication Flight finishes today and I would like you to know how much your services have been appreciated during the long period of service you have given to the Royal Air Force as a pilot.

Your record as a pilot in East Africa in all kinds of weather is one to be proud of and the reliability with which you have maintained the services for which you have been responsible is indeed an enviable one.

I need hardly add how much your presence will be missed at all units under my command and also by the many hundreds of passengers who have had the privilege of flying with you in these territories.

On behalf of all officers under my command I would extend to you our heartiest congratulations on the completion of your long period of service with the Royal Air Force. We, one and all, wish you the very best of luck wherever you may go and can assure you that you will always be a welcome visitor at any Air Force station under my command.

Yours sincerely

(sd) H. S. Kerby

AIR VICE MARSHAL

AOC East Africa's letter thanking Mrs Wynne-Eyton for her service.

1943 from HQ RAF Middle East to the Air Ministry, asking for confirmation that members of the WAAF were to be employed as pilots.[5] The reply, stating that only the ATA would employ female pilots, might have caused a certain embarrassment in the Command, and perhaps led to the termination, just a month later, of Mrs Wynne-Eyton's 'WAAF' flying. Her archive includes a letter from the AOC RAF East Africa dated 29 October 1943, thanking her for her service with the East Africa Communications Flight, which terminated that day. She also received a Mention in Despatches. She is believed to have flown nearly 2,000 hours with the RAF and to have had a total of 4,000 hours.[6]

The RAF Museum holds the ATA personnel records; Mrs Wynne-Eyton's file shows that she was engaged by the ATA on 1 November 1940 and confirms that her employment was terminated on 29 October 1943.[7] It seems therefore that she was a member of the ATA all along, simply dressed as a WAAF pilot for administrative convenience. Her

Captioned, 'Blimey! Wot a war! Just met the missis – out 'ere in the WAAFS.' This cartoon was dedicated to Wg Cdr Wynne-Eyton.

papers include a cartoon showing two officers in a bar, with the caption "Blimey! Wot a war! Just met the missis – out 'ere in the WAAFs"[8]

After I had mentioned her in an article in *Air Clues*,[9] I received a copy of a letter from a man who had known her.[10] He had been told that HQ RAF Middle East in Cairo had called for a return of all civil pilots in Kenya; holders of the B [commercial pilot's] licence would be commissioned in the RAFVR, and those holding the A [private pilot's] licence would become sergeant pilots. The list from Nairobi included the name Jean Wynne-Eyton, and the staff in Cairo assumed it was a male of French extraction!

The letter recounts a flight with her in a Dragon Rapide:

> 'As it turned out my slight apprehension was justified because she lost herself on the flight and with my help found her target with 5 gallons of fuel left in each tank. As we made our approach to the emergency landing strip we had trouble in the port engine. It took Jean and I all that evening and part of next morning to put in another magneto which we found in the tool locker. Eventually Jean got enough revs to express her opinion that we could get off the ground, an opinion not shared by a warrant officer, a corporal and a civil examiner who were part of the team aboard. Only one other civil examiner volunteered to come with Jean and I – the others refused point blank. Eventually we reached Kitale where the engineer officer said the port engine was a write-off.'

The writer continued, ‘As I spent many hours working with Jean much conversation took place – which left me with two strong impressions: that she was a very strong-willed woman and that she was very proud of her unique position in the RAF. No way was she going to relinquish it.’

Jane returned to Kenya. Her husband was killed in November 1944, and she remarried in 1947, becoming Mrs Christie-Miller. She continued to fly, owning an Auster, and in 1950 was prosecuted for firing her pistol in a Nairobi nightclub.[11] She died in Kenya in November 1955.

Notes:

1 This date is from her Royal Aero Club record card – it has not been possible to find a record of her birth. Her ATA record states 1896.

2 *Flight*, 24 October 1930, p1168.

3 Fleming, G D; *Blue is the Sky*, (Bournemouth: William Earl, 1945) p104.

4 RAFM DB 259/T203631, ‘People you know’ in *East Africa News Review*, 28 April 1949.

5 AIR2/6092, Proposal to transfer WAAF. pilots to Air Transport Auxiliary.

6 Fleming, *op cit*, p104.

7 RAFM X004-9466/002/008.

8 RAFM DB 259/T203631.

9 Elliott, Peter; ‘The RAF’s First Women Pilots’ in *Air Clues*, Vol 44, No. 5, May 1990, pp170-174.

10 I am grateful to Sqn Ldr John Ticehurst for forwarding his father’s letter.

11 *East African Standard*, 28 January 1950 p5.

PRINCESS MARY'S ROYAL AIR FORCE NURSING SERVICE – THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

Mary Mackie

What follows is largely condensed from two of Mary's many books, Sky Wards *(Robert Hale, 2001) and* Wards In The Sky: the RAF's remarkable Nursing Service *(The History Press, 2014) which takes the story on to withdrawal from Afghanistan.*

The history of the Royal Air Force's own particular nursing service is full of drama, heroics, tragedy and, not least, humour. In common with other medical personnel, nurses of the air force remember the absurdity along with the hard work, the help they try to give, and the horrors of nursing during armed conflict. In the past hundred years they have seen it all. Their particular expertise is in caring for patients while in-flight.

Aerial evacuation of casualties – 'casevac' – began in 1918, at Helwan in Egypt, when a patient strapped firmly to a stretcher and swathed like a mummy against the dust was loaded into a cut-out section of the fuselage of a De Havilland 6 'Dung Hunter' for the fifteen-mile hop to the Stationary Hospital at Cairo. No female nurses were involved, though later their skills in casevac and its successor aeromed (aeromedical evacuation) became vital for both service and civilian personnel.

The RAF Nursing Service (RAFNS) came into being in June 1918, just two months after the formation of the RAF itself. Nurses were drawn from the Royal Navy's Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service (QARNNS), the British Army's Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) and civilian sources. Along with the new flying service, the new nursing service was considered to be a temporary organization, solely for the duration of the war. Its first permanent Matron-in-Chief (MiC) was Miss Joanna Margaret Cruickshank – an amazing lady.

Born in India in 1875, daughter of a Scottish engineer, Joanna Cruickshank began nursing as a helper in Lady Minto's Indian Nursing Association (INA). At the somewhat advanced age of thirty-

Medevac 1920s style. A Neil Robertson stretcher mounted on a DH 9A.

one, in 1907, she returned to England to obtain professional qualifications at Guy's Hospital. She gained extra diplomas in massage and midwifery before, around 1912, returning to India, where she re-joined Lady Minto's INA. As the Great War began, Sister Cruickshank joined the British Army – the QAIMNS – remaining in India, where she contracted a malignant form of malaria and, in March 1918, was invalided home to Britain. The journey proved eventful, especially for a sick woman of forty-two. In the Mediterranean, her ship was torpedoed. She wrote:

> 'We had, of course, been aware of the danger, but none of us realised just what it would feel like. Even now, that moment when the ship was struck is as vivid in my memory as when it happened. We had to take to the open boats and after a few hours at sea we were picked up by a Q-boat and sent home overland through Spain. We expected at any time to be detained as prisoners of war.'

Fortunately, she arrived home safely and, having recovered from her illness, joined the RAFNS in October 1918. She became Matron-in-Chief on 25 November, just three days before her forty-third birthday, and served in that capacity until 1930, when she was made a

Dame Joanna Cruickshank.
(National Portrait Gallery)

DBE. As Dame Joanna, she continued to work with organisations such as the Red Cross until after the Second World War.

Around the time she retired, Joanna Cruickshank gathered material for a future history of her Service. She asked her nurses to write down memories of the very early days. One of them, Senior Sister Marion Welch, vividly remembered events of 1918-19, at Blandford Camp in Dorset, which, as the war ended, was a sprawling, hutted camp, full of young recruits, German prisoners of war, soldiers awaiting demob, and members of the WRAF.

'They got us billets in Blandford [*village*], and we were taken to the camp by ambulance or lorry. When the ambulance deposited us at the camp we had quite a walk along the disused railway line to our night quarters. One night, three or four of us were walking along the line, and I was carrying the PUDDING. Matron had an idea we didn't need any food at night, but as a concession we had been allowed to make rice pudding! In the dark I caught my foot on a railway sleeper, and down I came! Away went the pudding, but so solid was it, it just hopped out of its dish whole! By the light of a lamp we found it. It had lost nothing, but gained a good quantity of coal- (and other) dust. We put it back carefully in its enamel pie dish. Cook – we had a good cook for the patients – washed it; it made three puddings!

[*But*] the really interesting tales could never be published. Who would credit the fact that at Blandford we had to nurse men on stretchers in empty huts without any hospital equipment? The weather was so appallingly wet that, even though we kept in gumboots and Burberry coats, we were

> drenched going from hut to hut, and constantly held up by armed sentries when on night duty. [*That*] was eventful, going round by the light of hurricane lamps. It always seemed pitchy dark and we had to walk endless distances to our hutted wards, over rough tracks and duckboards (mostly missing) – and mud – with rats running everywhere.
>
> That suicide wood at the back of the hospital lines was a grim reality and not a piece of newspaper fiction exploited by 'John Bull'.
>
> Then take the early days at Halton. No water laid on to the huts. Sisters gathering snow to boil down for water to do dressings and make tea!!! It all sounds so incredible nowadays. Shall I ever forget the night when that mad orderly Jones tried 3 times to set fire to the camp and hospital, the AOC's car dashing up at 2.30am and cutting the only decent length of fire hose we possessed.'

In the last few months of 1918, and through the ensuing Spanish flu pandemic which killed more people than had the war itself, sisters of the RAFNS served in hospitals and Station Sick Quarters (SSQ) across the land.

After the declaration of peace, moves were made to absorb both the RAF and its nursing service back into the two older armed services. Much argument ensued. For the RAFNS, the defining moment came on Friday 5 July 1919, when the redoubtable Miss Cruickshank, MiC of (temporary) air force nurses, came face to face with the equally formidable MiC of (long-established) army nurses. They were members of a committee convened 'to consider the administration of the RAF Nursing Service as a branch of QAIMNS'.

The crunch came when the lady who ruled army nurses learned that nursing sisters of the Royal Air Force would be stationed, not only at the main hospitals, but at SSQs on remote airfields. Indeed, some were already working as far afield as the wild reaches of Salisbury Plain.

'But who is in charge of them?' cried she, appalled by the idea of young women working so far from the supervisory eye of an older matron.

Miss Cruickshank replied crisply, 'They're grown women. They

don't need a nanny,' or words to that effect. It was a moment Joanna Cruickshank never forgot. As her writings reveal, she was determined that air force nurses could not and would not return to the old-fashioned, matriarchal regime that governed the army fold.

Happily, as we know, the powers-that-were eventually agreed that the RAF must continue and become a permanent part of Britain's defence structure. The Nursing Service also gained full recognition and in 1923 King George V agreed to allow his only daughter to become Royal Patron of Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service (PMRAFNS). Members of the service have proudly referred to themselves as 'PMs' ever since.

Before applying, air force sisters were required to be already fully qualified as nursing sisters. Aged between twenty-five and thirty-five, they had to be single and, of course, they had to be female. They held unofficial officer status but were addressed by nursing rank, from Junior Sister to Senior Matron, working alongside members of the RAF Medical Service (RAFMS), which included commissioned doctors and non-commissioned nurses, both male and female.

Uniform patterns were issued along with the requisite yards of blue whipcord, usually made-up by fond mothers or local seamstresses, some of whom thoughtfully added their own touches of individuality. Photographs of the time show interesting variations in length of lapel and placing of buttons. The first hats quaintly resembled bonnets, before Miss Cruickshank designed a new quatrecorn, designated the 'Dick Turpin' – it had to be four-cornered because, as MiC QARNNS sternly observed, the tricorne was the prerogative of Navy Nurses.

During the 1920s, three main RAF hospitals were established in Britain – at Finchley, in London; at the RAF College, Cranwell, in Lincolnshire, and in 1927 the new RAF Hospital Halton was opened by HRH the Princess Mary, accompanied by MiC Miss Joanna Cruickshank. Its first matron was Marion Welch.

In that same decade, the first overseas hospitals were being established. As early as 1922 some Nursing Sisters sailed for hospitals in Iraq and Palestine, to support the aircrew still engaged in Middle Eastern conflicts. Before and after her stint as Matron at Halton, Marion Welch was Matron at Hinaidi, first in the old army hospital and then at a splendid new purpose-built RAF British General Hospital, situated on the banks of the Tigris, some eight miles outside

Baghdad. According to Miss Welch, this new hospital comprised:

> 'seven or eight large buildings containing wards with high, cool ceilings and wide verandas to alleviate the heat, with space for five hundred patients of both the air force and the army.'

Sister Louise Hardy remembered:

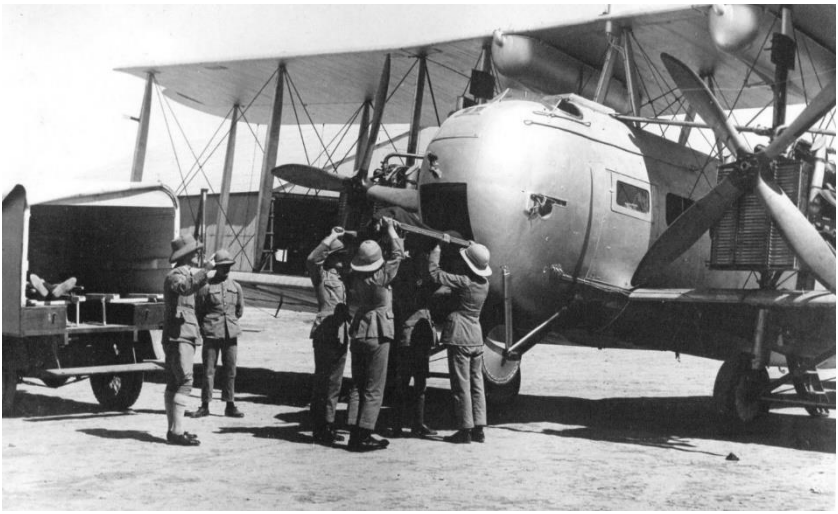
> 'a superb building, the wards named after the Air Aces of the 1914 war. Our Mess and living quarters were also on the grand scale, the ante-room very attractive and comfortable, the floor covered with beautiful Persian carpets. Our bedrooms were very large, each with its own bathroom. On the flat roof above was a second bedstead where one could sleep in the hot weather.'

1923 saw eight RAF squadrons based in Iraq – six around Baghdad and two further north among the hills at Mosul, flying sorties against rebellious tribes and Turkish forces. Death and injury stalked every flight over craggy gorges, inhospitable mountains and baking deserts. With tropical medicine still in its early stages, endemic diseases also took their toll and men could die of simple heat-stroke. The commander of Hinaidi-based 45 Squadron, Sqn Ldr (later Sir Arthur 'Bomber') Harris, wrote that he would never forget 'the appalling climate, the filthy food, and the ghastly lack of every sort of amenity that our unfortunate men were compelled to put up with in "peace time".'

Casevac skills of the Medical Service were put to their first real test when a severe outbreak of dysentery struck in the arid mountains of Kurdistan, where the only available means of ground transport was mules and donkeys. Back in Baghdad, emergency plans swung into operation and soon the largest casevac yet seen was under way. Over five days, using twelve aircraft and covering a total flying distance of nearly 10,000 miles, the RAF conveyed a total of 198 patients some 200 miles to the splendid new hospital at Hinaidi and the tender loving care of PMRAFNS sisters.[1] The operation conclusively proved the vital role which the RAF could play in the future, transporting the sick and wounded.

Over fourteen eventful years, Hinaidi was home for many PMs.

[1] See *RAFHS Journal* No 43, pp122-126



The evacuees from Kurdistan were brought out by Vernon transports, mostly as 'walking wounded', but the dedicated ambulance version, as here, had a facility for loading a stretcher.

They enjoyed the services of a domestic staff of Assyrian bearers, with hospital assistants, both Muslim and Hindu, and leisure facilities including two fine tennis courts and stabling for fourteen horses.

> 'It was customary to ride in the early morning before breakfast,' wrote Louise Hardy. 'In accordance with the social etiquette of those days, we had to pay calls and receive callers. We were also elected to membership of the British Club – the centre of social life for the British Community.'

Matron Welch wrote to her good friend Miss Cruickshank:

> 'Last night we had several health films shown in the hospital, one on Malaria, another on Hookworm and 2 comics called "Giro the Germ" issued by the National Health and Cleanliness Council in London. The portable cinema apparatus was lent to Mr Lampard by the Ford Motor Co. On Saturday we are to have the latest Ford films on production of cars and farming implements. The men are always so interested in anything mechanical.'

In 1929, invited to become Miss Cruickshank's successor as Matron-in-Chief of the PMRAFNS, Miss Welch declined. She had other plans – at the age of forty-two, she was to marry Mr Lampard, the gentleman who operated the 'portable cinema apparatus.' He was resident in Baghdad as secretary of the YMCA. Sad to tell, Mrs Marion Lampard died of septicaemia, at the age of fifty, in the RAF Hospital at Habbaniya.

In the late 1930s, as war loomed yet again, the Air Ministry began to gather a reserve force for both the RAF and its nursing service. Until then the PMRAFNS had comprised an elite few – 100 or so – and many of them were no longer young and were rather set in their ways. The influx of all those bright young things came as a bit of a shock to the old guard, who were regarded, in turn, by the youngsters as battle axes.

At Halton, Matron frowned upon too much lipstick and short skirts. She required new members to demonstrate that their popliteal space (the backs of their knees) would not be showing when they bent over to attend to patients or make beds. One of the incomers, Sister Rona Black, remembered:

> 'We new members were unofficially referred to as "Bog rats" and we thought the Senior Sisters very old. They were about forty, possibly younger . . . I wouldn't say we were received with open arms – at best we were tolerated. I suppose my worst offence was to be seen in the Sergeants' Mess, where was the only piano, practising my songs for a concert.'

It was, of course, not done for a nursing officer to be caught fraternising with NCOs. Another somewhat irreverent 'new girl' was posted to the Flying Training School at RAF Cranwell, during the quiet period known as the 'Phoney War'. Apparently, they weren't observing blackout regulations. She wrote:

> 'Lights were on all the time, there were no curtains and the flare paths were lit up. They had accidents with the boys who were learning to fly, and the blackout meant more accidents. So they gave them every light they could – occasionally a German plane would come in at the tail end of their exercises.'

The first real air-raid she experienced came on a night in June, when:

> ‘the bombs fell right down the runway, which was lucky, for had they gone a little more to one side they would have hit the Officers’ Mess, the Sisters’ Mess and the Hospital. As it was, it didn’t cause much damage. Three bombs did not explode and the naughty Officers put them in front of their Mess in the garden and were having bets on which one would go off first. And all the bits of bomb, shrapnel, etc, which were lying around were gathered up by everyone as keepsakes. Little did we know that everyone could get a bit of bomb eventually, but at that time it was all new and everyone wanted a souvenir. When the bomb disposal people came down they were furious because there were no bits of bomb left for them.
>
> ‘I remember after the raid asking one of the Officers if anyone had been hurt and he said, no, only one casualty, and that was the Padre – his knees were sore because he had been down on them praying all the time.’

Less respectable affairs were happening, too: in 1941 Sister Jessie ‘Higgie’ Higgins (who served for thirty years and retired as a Senior Matron, Wing Commander) was working at RAFH Cosford, as a welfare sister for the WAAF. Interviewed in the late 1990s, she recalled:

> ‘They put me on to what they called WAAF Welfare, that was looking after “naughty girls”. There were about 2,000 WAAF at Cosford – not all of them naughty girls – and I was responsible for seeing they had their FFI [*free from infection*] inspections. It was just nits – and spotting pregnancies, of course. The WAAF officers didn’t know what they were looking for. Anyway, I did this FFI and it took me about a fortnight to get through them all. I reckoned there were twenty-two girls pregnant – all stages, from six or seven weeks to a good, what I call nine and a half months. Half these kids didn’t know what was happening. So, of course, I had to tell the WAAF officer, and of course she went running to the CO and I was hauled up there. Phone call – “You will be here within fifteen minutes, Sistah!” So I hops on my bike and went in. WAAF Officer, CO – he says, “What’s this I hear? Twenty-two girls pregnant on my station? You’ve got a dirty mind, sister!”

‘Anyway,’ Higgie concluded, ‘they all had babies.’

From 1939, RAF Hospitals and other medical units spread across half the globe – Iceland, Africa, Aden, India, Burma and eventually Japan. PMs served in all these places, and in many others in between, at temporary hospitals, staging posts and mobile units. Though granted ‘emergency’ officer status, they continued to hold and be called by their nursing titles. They were not fully integrated and allowed to hold commissions until 1949.

They were also attached to many Mobile Field Hospitals (MFH), following the troops wherever they went. In India, personnel of Nos 61 and 62 MFHs combined to establish a hospital in the village of Chittagong. The CO and his doctors went to look for a suitable site, while Jessie Higgins, being the senior nurse, took charge of the nursing team of sisters and male orderlies. They took over a derelict girls’ school and for extra wards built basha huts, described by Higgie as:

> ‘bamboo buildings with just a roof of bamboo, no windows or doors, but better than canvas tents as at least we had a little breeze. Latrines and a washing area were built for the men. The equipment we had was nothing! Because, of course, everything that was supposed to arrive in the Far East never did, they were torpedoed so much. We had one set of so-called theatre instruments, and we had to sterilise with methylated spirit lamps to heat the water. As a field hospital, of course, we only used the operating theatre for emergencies – tiny little room at the end of this old school that we took over and, of course, we had the snakes, scorpions, every sort of creepy crawly.’

Their 150 beds were soon filled.

> ‘So much sickness,’ was what Jessie Higgins remembered, ‘dysentery, malaria, jaundice, typhoid, even smallpox. Very few surgical cases, mostly abscesses – very common – appendix, leg fractures, and occasionally a real casualty such as gunshot wounds, flying accidents and crashes.
>
> ‘We had awful problems getting ill boys to eat and drink because the food was absolutely ghastly and of course you couldn’t get any oranges or lemons, the only thing you could

PMRAFNS sisters of No 1 General Hospital at Torre del Greco near Naples in 1944.

get was limes. We used to barter them for pilchards in tomato juice. We had a lot of boys with minor heart conditions, a result of dysentery or typhoid.'

The staff used the precious limes to make squash to add vitamin C to the diet of the very ill patients.

Other RAF Mobile Field Hospitals followed the Allies across North Africa, through Sicily and up into Italy. One team took over a convalescent home at Torre del Greco, near Naples, on the lower slopes of Mount Vesuvius. On the night of 22 March 1944 (at the height of the battle for Cassino), the volcano erupted – spectacular displays of boiling smoke, sparks, flying red hot boulders and rivers of molten lava, glowing in the darkness. A blanket of hot ash descended on the roof of the hospital, so they were ordered to evacuate, as Sister Mary Drew observed:

'After a difficult night, with windows falling and a minor earthquake, it was decided at 6am that we should evacuate. I instructed my 100 patients to fill one of their pillowcases with

> their belongings. Everything was covered in thick dust, and the village of San Sebastiano was destroyed. The lava flow finished at the wall of a house and the ground was very hot for weeks afterwards.'

Fortunately for patients of that hospital, the wind blew most of the volcanic debris in the opposite direction, where ash and cinders blocked the road for twenty-five miles.

One of the war heroines of the PMRAFNS was 'Fluffy' Jones/Ogilvie/Bower, a delightful lady still going strong at nearly ninety when we met. When she applied to join the PMs in 1939 she was twenty-four years old, five feet two and slightly-built, with a halo of fluffy golden curls, hence her nickname. As a Junior Sister, she was stationed at the convalescent hospital in Torquay when it was badly bombed and many people lost their lives. She met and married an injured bomber pilot, Sqn Ldr Donald Ogilvie, who within a few months was shot down again and killed. After this tragedy, Fluffy said, 'I felt I had to DO something.' What she did was volunteer for special duties.

She later wrote her own vivid account of her wartime experiences, which runs to seventy pages. It begins:

> 'I sat in silence in my battle dress and tin hat, with a Red Cross armband prominently on my left arm. Straight ahead, jeeps, trucks and ambulances could be seen mounting the hill in the distance. In spite of the familiar sound of the convoy making its progress, it seemed incredibly still, almost unreal. The memorable day was 5th June 1944 and I was setting out on what was to be the greatest adventure of my life.'

Iris 'Fluffy' Ogilvie and her colleague Sister Mollie Giles were among thousands of men in the convoys funnelling down to Gosport. It was 11 June when they finally boarded a landing craft for the Channel crossing and, after delays and holdups which kept them at sea for more than twenty-four hours, they arrived off the Normandy coast, where battle was still raging, and night had fallen. Fluffy wrote:

> 'I remember standing next to Mollie in the dark, on the left side of the lower deck. The inside towered above us. I felt as though I was inside a monstrous whale. I couldn't see what was

> happening in the darkness, but I was very aware of the noisy vehicles and personnel dashing about. I felt no emotion, nothing at all, just standing there with my pack on my back looking down towards the ramp which I could just about make out. We didn't speak a word. Suddenly we were told to go. We scrambled down the ramp and the next thing I remember was feeling sand under my feet. I had landed on Juno/Red Beach, in pitch darkness, on June 12th 1944.'

They were the first women into Normandy on D-Day+6 – several days ahead of any other females. Nor did it end there – they went on to Brussels and then across Germany, following the troops in the final days before Germany surrendered. Fluffy was also involved in flying the sickest prisoners out when Belsen was liberated. For the work they did, Sisters Ogilvie and Giles were both awarded the MBE.

The bombs that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki starkly announced the opening of the nuclear age. In the field of medicine a more subtle enemy – infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis) – posed a fresh challenge for doctors and nurses.

The RAF's temporary war-time hospitals, at home and overseas, were closed. In Britain, the remaining five general hospitals (Cosford, Ely, Halton, Nocton Hall, Wroughton) and another five station hospitals (Padgate, St Athan, Weeton, West Kirby, Wilmslow) adjusted themselves to meet the needs of a peacetime air force. Abroad, RAF hospitals in Aden, Egypt and Iraq were joined by new ones in West Germany and Singapore, and staging posts on the transport and aeromed route from the Far East to the UK all opened sick quarters or small hospitals. These new units offered exciting postings for PMs.

In 1948, seven PMs became the first British nurses to undertake a parachute-jumping course identical to that used in training para-troopers. This was intended to cover any future emergency where medical teams might literally have to leap to the rescue. The standard course involved eight jumps, three from a balloon and five from a Dakota, including one jump by night, using parachutes of the old 'X' type, with no reserve 'chutes. After two years, the PMRAFNS Advisory Board commented that nursing sisters had done excellent work in 'demonstrating the capacity of women to undertake arduous

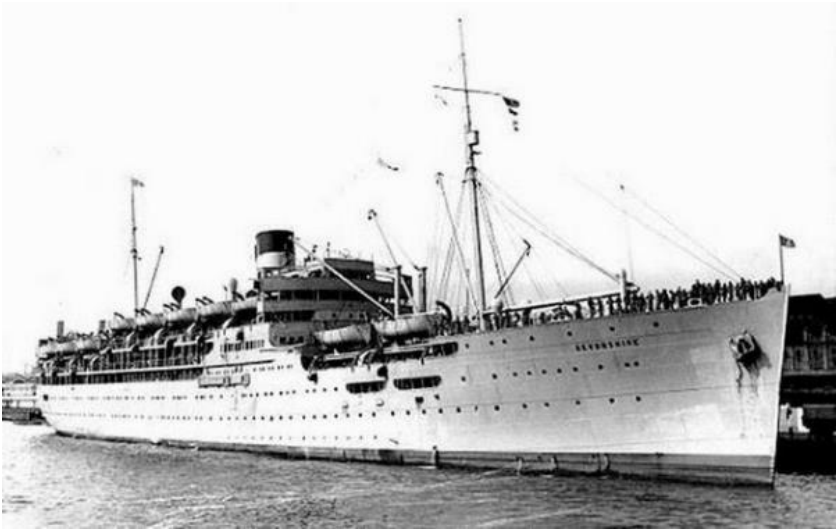
PMRAFNS sisters training as parachutists in 1948.

and unique duties.' However, when no need for such emergency medical teams arose, parachuting disappeared from the PMs' curriculum.

In those days of slow aeroplanes with limited passenger space, British troops and their families moved around the world by sea. Nursing and medical officers, with a full sick quarters staff, went with them to look after their health on the long voyages.

The famous HMT *Devonshire* made many voyages with PMs on duty in her sick bay. Among them was Jessie Higgins:

> 'It used to take thirty or thirty-one days [*to Singapore*]. Went through the Med, down the Canal and through the Red Sea to Aden, then straight across to Colombo, in Ceylon. *Devonshire* had 120 hospital beds on it. We had all the families, umpteen wives and children. Coming back, we used to bring all the sick. It was before the days when antibiotics were being used properly, and a [*for*] people with prickly-heat, penicillin made it ten times worse. We'd say, right, we're going up the Canal



HMT Devonshire – *typical of the many troopships that serviced the steadily shrinking empire until well into the 1960s.*

tomorrow, turn left into the Med, and they'll all be better in a day – and they were!'

Doreen Smedley was aboard when they took the Irish Fusiliers out to Tripoli and brought the King's Royal Rifles back. EOKA terrorists were active in Cyprus at the time, so the ship stayed in the harbour and everything was brought out to them, including the station band, on a float, to play for them. On another trip they had two hundred children aboard: 'The first measle appeared as we sailed down Southampton Water.'

But sea trooping was coming to an end. *Devonshire*'s last trooping voyage was in December 1961, when, on leaving Malta, the ship received a rousing send-off – she had been a favourite visitor at Mediterranean bases. But all the troopships are fondly remembered by the many PMs who served aboard them. They provided a means by which single girls could get away from home and see the world.

Postings to overseas hospitals provided a more in-depth method of sampling foreign climes for some PMs. Others saw the world in fleeting glimpses, escorting patients on the aeromedical evacuation flights which, more and more, became a vital part of a nursing sister's

An aeromed Hastings, inbound from RAFH Changi, about to be unloaded.

career. Their object was to bring back to England any ill or injured service personnel, members of their families, and other British government employees (such as teachers and diplomats) who, while working abroad, might require specialist or urgent treatment not available locally. Other civilian patients might benefit from the service if circumstance warranted. At first, any nursing officer could be plucked from her ward and sent to escort an aeromed patient half way across the world. She learned, perforce, by doing the job.

For a while, Dakotas and Valettas continued in use for medium-length flights, but from 1948 the Handley Page Hastings became the RAF's standard long-range transport aircraft. It could be fitted out to carry between twenty-eight and thirty-two patients, with stretchers fitted in tiers down each side of the central aisle.

However, flying aeromed aboard a Hastings was not ideal: being unpressurized and unable to fly above 10,000 feet, the aircraft encountered a good deal of turbulence. Respiratory distress among patients, allied with cramped working conditions, and the need to

A PM tending to a patient fitted with a Monaghan cuirass in a Britannia.

shout to be heard (while sometimes wearing ear-protectors against the deafening noise of those old piston engines) caused added problems for nurses, especially on those long, long flights to and from the Far East. The minimum time for a flight to Singapore was five days, including stops for refuelling and overnight rest breaks when patients would be unloaded and taken to the hospital or sick quarters attached to each staging post – in places such as Ceylon [now Sri Lanka], El Adem in Libya, and the tiny island of Gan in the Maldives, in the middle of the Indian Ocean. In practice, journeys often took longer than scheduled – many stories of early aeromeds include the words 'the aircraft went u/s and we were delayed.' The delay could last hours or days.

The arrival of jet aircraft synchronised with a programme of more intensive aeromed training, which began in in 1959 when the RAF introduced an Aeromedical Course for both the PMRAFNS and personnel of the RAFMS. It culminated in a professional qualification of 'flight nurse' or 'flight attendant' and included survival techniques – emergency escape from crashed aircraft and all that would entail when also dealing with injured patients. Back on dry land they studied the effects of altitude on both patients and equipment, became familiar with the various aircraft they might be using, and learned how to load patients correctly, fix stretcher harnesses and pack medical panniers; they studied the relation of GMT to other time zones, so that drugs could be given at correct intervals, and they were taught how to handle a polio patient in and out of an aircraft while he was in a Monaghan cuirass – the RAF's portable version of an iron lung. Nursing in the air is a highly specialized skill.

PMs Iris Rawlings and Dorothy Hutchins were on call for aeromed duty in 1961 when Hurricane Hattie hit British Honduras and flattened its capital, Belize. The PMs and the rest of their team (male doctors and technicians of the RAFMS) hastened to RAF Lyneham, boarded a Britannia and flew the 6,000 miles across the Atlantic, to find the whole town wrecked and the airfield flooded – their landing was pretty tricky. Iris Rawlings told me:

> 'It was decided that we should rehouse and tend the patients from the local hospital, which had been totally demolished. We commandeered the remains of the house of a local dignitary. This was the largest house in the area and, having been two-storeyed, still had one floor with a ceiling.
>
> 'Next to the hospital there was a water storage tank, where people would queue with their receptacles. Hutch and I would sometimes go out on what remained of the veranda and watch. One day we were told that a body had risen to the top of the tank . . .'

Dorothy Hutchins recalled:

> 'Sanitary arrangements consisted of a bucket which, for lack of other means of disposal, had to be emptied into the sea. There was a nightly curfew because of escaped prisoners and looting, a fire watch duty because of hurricane lamps, and the US Air Force dropped emergency food packs of tinned goods, including tinned bread, tinned butter, even tinned Smarties.'

Iris Rawlings added:

> 'One of our patients died and an army truck came round to collect the body. I talked to one of the soldiers, who couldn't have been more than 18 years old. It seemed their daily task was to go round collecting bodies and taking them for cremation on pyres by the sea shore. The ground was too flooded for burial – sheer volume of bodies apart – and the bodies could not be kept. I imagine the memory must haunt him for life – it does me, and I only heard about it.'

A revolutionary change occurred in 1980 when, at last, male nurses were allowed to hold commissions and join the PMRAFNS. The move

was not without its problems. Joy Harris, later MiC, remembered:

> 'We did have trouble commissioning our boys. They used to put the officers through Biggin Hill, and some of the most suitable chaps were getting turned down. Then one chap, who we didn't think was suitable at all, got through. When Matron-in-Chief of the time went into it, the thing they were failing them on was 'lack of aggression' – of course you don't want aggressive nurses!'

In 1980 the PMRAFNS was integrated when male nurses were permitted to join.

Unsurprisingly, certain older ladies took the inclusion of men rather badly. One retired PM, on learning that the MiC in 1996 was a male of the species, remarked dourly, 'They're getting in everywhere!'

During the Falklands conflict, PMs were, of course, in the forefront of caring for casualties. The RAF Hospital at Wroughton, near Swindon, was once again (as it had been during the Second World War) the place where all the wounded were taken on arrival in England.

Wroughton was the final link in a chain that stretched back to the war zone, in ships or in the field, where male medics and nurses gave primary care. This was followed by treatment in the surgical unit at Ajax Bay and then a phase aboard the 'hospital at sea', SS *Uganda*. From there both British and Argentinian casualties were evacuated by sea to Montevideo (by courtesy of the Uruguayan government). Those well enough to withstand the eighteen-hour flight home were then taken to waiting VC10s.

For the PMRAFNS, the major task was the air evacuation link of the chain, 7,000 miles across the Atlantic, with a refuelling stop at Ascension or, occasionally, in West Africa, and on to Brize Norton. Each team comprised two medical officers, six flight nursing officers

and eight flight nursing attendants. Their aircraft could carry up to sixty-six patients, all needing different types of medical care: young sailors on stretchers with broken and shredded limbs; blinded soldiers leaning on ragged, bandaged comrades; bullet and shrapnel injuries, burns. It was the largest movement of casualties, by air, ever undertaken by British armed forces. From Brize Norton, patients travelled by ambulance or coach to reception and assessment at RAFH Wroughton. Finally, they were transferred to appropriate specialist units, base hospitals, or, for the more fortunate, to their homes.

Wg Cdr Zena Cheel (Matron at Wroughton in 1982) said:

> 'They tended to come in batches. We got a big batch of burns after [*HMS*] Galahad went up. We were looking this particular night on the telly and they were showing these people being transferred onto hospital ships from Ascension Island, and we noticed they all had their hands in plastic bags. I did my plastic surgery training in the air force, but when people had hands burned we used to wrap each individual finger, to stop them getting what they called 'the webbing', but evidently they found that if people put their hands in plastic bags and they were occluded (so that no infection can get in), they can move their fingers, but all the exudate just collects in the bottom of the bags. So I went down to the local supermarket and bought all the plastic bags on their shelves.'

Sqn Ldr Ann Golding remembered how donations flooded in, from Marks and Spencer, local shops and individual people:

> 'It was fantastic – pyjamas, towels, toiletries – and television sets! And [*Matron Cheel*] was overwhelmed by the number of fruit farmers that were donating strawberries, intended to go out to the Falklands, but really, you haven't got space on the aircraft. I would ring up to get the numbers of things coming in and all I could get was the number of these blooming strawberries, so I used to get really irate: "I don't want to know about the strawberries, I want to know about the patients!"'

Changes, both in medical practice, nurse training and, not least, national finance concerns, began seriously to affect the PMRAFNS. The fine and much-loved RAF Hospitals began to show their age and,

one by one, faced closure. In 1995 the first man to be appointed Matron-in-Chief of the PMRAFNS, Gp Capt (later Air Cdre) Robert H Williams, was obliged to oversee the demise of the last three of the old-style hospitals – Wegberg in West Germany, Wroughton in Wiltshire and Halton in Buckinghamshire. All were closed in 1996, along with hospitals of the army and navy, to be succeeded by Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs) integrated within certain existing NHS Hospitals, where members of all three Services would work together as part of the Defence Medical Services.

News of these cost-cutting plans brought a renewed clamour of protest: Service Hospitals had provided care for thousands of civilians, as well as members of the armed forces, and they had helped to pioneer many medical advances over the years. The memory of the RAF Hospitals is still widely cherished.

Wherever their base might be, for the PMs and their colleagues, the need for nursing care went on. When the former Yugoslavia began to break up amid much inter-ethnic violence, in the mid-1990s, PMs wore the blue UN beret, with camouflage battledress. They went fully armed and were trained to shoot if necessary. PM Kev Mackie, serving with UNPROFOR in Bosnia, 1995, said:

> ‘We went as part of the Rapid Reaction Force and we sat in a place called Ploce, which was actually in Croatia. I had twelve medics who were assigned to me, who flew around in aircraft. Basically, if there was a helicopter in the air – an RAF helicopter, not a teeny-weeny army thing – it had a medic on board. We flew with crews at night – we used the infra-red night-vision goggles, in the back of a kite with the lights off and doing tactical flying. We got shot at – as you do!
>
> ‘I managed quite a few hours in both Pumas and Chinooks, more than fifty aeromeds and casevacs, so that kept us quite busy. We had a young Croatian lad, he was run over, nasty RTA [*road traffic accident*] and we actually took him to a local Croatian hospital, as a good-will thing, in the back of a helicopter. You don’t expect, in the field, to look after children. That’s a big thing the services have learned, that midwives and paediatric nurses are as important as trauma people. You’re not talking about bomb-blast victims, you’re talking about people

The interior of a Chinook in the medevac role in Afghanistan.

with barbed-wire lacerations, or dysentery – just everyday incidents that happen. We've got to be able to treat them all.'

This care of all people, hoping to win hearts and minds, continued into Afghanistan. A correspondent wrote a series of 'Letters from the front', one of which reads in part:

'The other day, the Chief UK nurse, a senior officer of the PMRAFNS, gave an excellent account of an outreach visit that he and a French medical team had carried out to a local village. He described the conditions that some of the sick were undergoing, often quite needlessly. Most were suffering from bacterial infections and lung conditions which were easily treated by simple antibiotics. The nearest medical facility, 40km away, is often unmanned and a trip to the nearest hospital unaffordable. The most poignant example he gave was of an eight-year-old girl who was losing her sight to a parasitical infestation. Without treatment she would have been blind in 6 months; two weeks on and she is almost completely cured. Our people are making a real difference here and it is good to serve alongside them.'

A Chinook-borne Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT), led by a PM, Flt Lt Fiona McGlyynn (centre), conveying a casualty to the hospital at Camp Bastion. (Allied Command Transformation/NATO)

As the 21st Century began, the Ministry of Defence prepared for the future by creating a large hospital complex to offer comprehensive and up-to-date specialist care for injured service personnel and also to provide training for medical staff of all three services, to ready them for working in war zones. The chosen location was in Birmingham, the old Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the Selly Oak Hospital. The Royal Defence Medical College became part of the University of Birmingham's Medical School, while the Defence School of Health Care Studies is based at Birmingham City University. This latter provides training for all military nurses and allied health professionals and it is here that many members of the PMRAFNS acquire their nurse training, often to degree standard, at what is now the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine. Many PMs have worked there since it opened in 2001.

One of the first RAF nurses posted to Birmingham was Lee Bond:

> 'I had an opportunity to go and work there, on the Selly Oak ITU (*Intensive Therapy Unit*), which was – still is – a big

The RAF's state-of-the art medevac facilities in a C-17.
(MOD/Sgt Neil Bryden)

> teaching centre. Totally different way of working to a district hospital, different patient groups, a lot more challenging; it was a regional trauma centre – regional burns centre. Phenomenal clinical experience. [*It was*] just good luck that we were put there, considering what happened in future years, in Iraq and Afghanistan.'

In March 2007, some anxious relatives accused the hospital of not caring properly for wounded men coming back from the war in Iraq and national newspapers reported incidents of servicemen being verbally abused in the hospital by members of the public opposed to the war. PM Debbie Meikle was part of a small team sent to smooth troubled waters. She said:

> 'The NHS were doing a good job looking after the people returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, but they didn't know the processes with regard to moving them on to rehabilitation, so it was delayed. It was emotionally draining because, not only did you have the patients, you were dealing with the relatives, and the relatives wanted someone to blame, so a lot of the time they took it out on the staff. That was the hardest thing I had to deal

Tactical Medical Wing personnel conducting a training exercise at Brize Norton. (RAF Brize Norton)

with. But the experience was fantastic. The trauma injuries that you get up there are very good for learning. And, with long-stay patients, it does test your nursing skills.'

Paradoxically, warfare always provides opportunity for medical and surgical advances.

A magnificent new hospital building – the Queen Elizabeth Hospital – officially opened in Birmingham in 2012. Among many specialities it boasts the largest organ transplant programme in the UK and the largest critical care unit in the world. It provides a whole range of services for civilian patients while also being the main reception centre for all wounded servicemen and -women coming from areas of conflict.

Nor is it only in hospitals and other medical units that the work goes on: aeromed remains a vital part of PMRAFNS working life. The RAF's Tactical Medical Wing, now based at RAF Brize Norton, trains, equips and deploys personnel in support of operations and exercises, to provide a worldwide aeromedical evacuation service. A team of twelve medical personnel is always on call, with six hours' notice to move, to provide first response medical capability and aeromedical evacuation to any crisis worldwide.

Today's military nurses are far from the veiled and smiling 'angels' of fond memory. They are highly trained women and men,

multi-skilled technicians, working together in a tri-Service environment whether belonging to the QARNNS, the QARANC or the PMRAFNS. They may be fewer in number than they were during the world wars, but they remain dedicated to their task of serving their country by caring for patients, and hurrying to tend people across the world, wherever man or nature creates chaos and casualties – from an earthquake in Nepal to an ebola outbreak in Africa. Some PMs have died while on aeromed duty; many others have risked life and limb during wartime, struggled to work in filthy conditions – ice, mud, sandstorm-ravaged deserts and malaria-ridden jungles – or they have simply done their daily duty, caring for the sick whoever and wherever they may be. Off-duty they are equally busy, raising funds for charities, involved in sports, brass bands … the list is long and my space limited.

Whatever their experience may have been, in war or in peace, not one of them regrets a single moment of service life. The sentiment of all of them was aptly expressed by Gwen Butler, whose career in the PMs, begun in 1925, took her from early Halton to Palestine and the kingdom of Iraq. During the Second World War she was matron of RAFH Lagens in the Azores and, after becoming the first matron of RAFH Nocton Hall, she went on to become senior matron at RAFH Halton. On her retirement in 1952, she recalled her twenty-seven years with the Service, adding, ‘If I had my time over again I would not change one second of it. I think this is the most wonderful nursing service in the world. I have been thrilled with every minute.’

The Eulogy for
Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Squire GCB DFC AFC DL FRAeS
delivered at the Memorial Service held at St Clement Danes Church on 1 June 2018 by Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns

Two months ago many of us here today celebrated and commemorated in this church the foundation of the RAF and 100 years of service to the Nation – service that in wartime and peacetime has been illuminated by the deeds of great men.

Sadly, the death of Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Squire three weeks before that service added another name to that exclusive register of those whose achieve-ments of great distinction in peace and war merit a position of honour and esteem in the history of our Service.

In considering Sir Peter's contribution to the wellbeing and reputation of the RAF, which we celebrate today, there is no better starting place than his chosen motto of 'Example through Endeavour'. This motto underwrites his coat of arms in the Henry VII Chapel, within Westminster Abbey.

Throughout his life, from schoolboy to CAS, his whole character reflected consistency of endeavour whether it was at work or play. And endeavour expended in his unremitting determination to do his best, no matter the severity of the challenge, no matter its uniqueness and without fear of failure. These were the hallmarks of a man in whom selfless devotion to duty was the lodestar that guided him to the summit of his chosen profession.

Peter joined the RAF as a Cranwell Flight Cadet in 1963 to fulfil an ambition he first formed as a young boy – and, as the son of a wing commander decorated with a DSO and DFC while serving with Coastal Command in WW II, perhaps it can be assumed that military

aviation was well established in his DNA.

At Cranwell his determination to give of his best, without trampling on the ambitions of his contemporaries, earned him more than professional distinction in flying training and associated academic studies. His contemporaries recall his human decency in his unaffected behaviour within a highly competitive environment. No wonder he forged close friendships that endured throughout the 72 years of his life.

But none of these longstanding associations stretching back to Cranwell days were more important than his first meeting with Carolyn who he was to marry seven years later, having reached the magic age of 25 that then allowed them to enjoy the benefits of drawing marriage allowance and living in public accommodation at rental costs.

Such consistency of attachment was not untested. In 1965 Peter, and forty-one other Flight Cadets, were detailed off to escort Miss World contestants at their celebration ball in London – hard to believe, but not fake news. The possibility of temptation to stray from the paths of righteousness cannot be ignored, so suffice to say that notwithstanding the charms of his partner, Miss Iceland, Peter stayed faithful to Carolyn whom he had first met a year before.

His loyalty reaped its own just reward in the family happiness that was to be the bedrock of his life in the years ahead. And a bedrock held firm by Carolyn's understanding that when Peter faced a conflict of interest between family and Service the latter would probably come first.

The motto 'Example through Endeavour' also gives a clue to Peter's competitiveness. He revelled in competition at work and at play. While play was later to cost him two hip replacements, his flying aptitude was recognised in his selection as the Hunter display pilot for two years when instructing at RAF Valley. And while there, and against stiff opposition, he won the Wright Jubilee competition that selected the best display pilot in Flying Training Command.

Elsewhere he pursued his passion for cricket as an accomplished wicket keeper and an aggressive batsman, and others were to discover a game of squash against Peter could be a bruising experience, albeit with no transgressions against the rules of the game. But it was his inherent competitiveness, hallmarked by steely determination to win

by fair means rather than foul, that characterised the quality of his leadership that was soon to be put to the test in the most taxing and arduous of circumstances.

Peter's first operational experience as a Hunter ground attack pilot serving on No 20 Squadron in Singapore, followed by his distinguished service as a flying instructor and display pilot, earned him early promotion to squadron leader and a posting to Harriers where he was to serve as a Flight Commander on No 3(F) Squadron in RAF Germany.

As a Site Commander, deployed into the field with six aircraft and 150 men from the RAF and Army under command, he was more than equal to the responsibilities of his first semi-independent command. And here he was to demonstrate not only calmness under unusual pressures but that composure, perhaps *sang-froid*, that was another of his distinguishable characteristics.

In the boiling hot year of 1976, the Harrier Force deployed into the field for its summer exercise. Peter's site was too far distant from an Army barracks for bath runs so, as the first weekend approached, a junior pilot was dispatched to find a bathing venue closer to the site. The task was soon accomplished. A nearby factory had a pool, sauna and café. Access was agreed and at no cost.

Peter set off for the first bath run accompanied by his seven pilots. Leading from the front as usual he changed quickly and was first through the changing room door to the pool. Only to return moments later to explain that he had been told to leave adding that everyone in the pool area was naked. So he removed his swimming trunks and back he went only to return again with access once more apparently denied. The junior pilot who had made the arrangements, now somewhat concerned, was then deployed to discuss the problem with the owner. The JP, later to achieve air rank, who had a firmer grasp of the German language than Peter came back with the answer. 'Diving is forbidden in the pool with or without swimming trunks.' Problem sorted.

Apart from such minor tests of his leadership, his tour on 3 Squadron was acknowledged with the well-deserved award of an AFC to add to the QCVSA earned at Valley – ideal preparation for command of a squadron. And this was his greater reward when on promotion he took command of No 1(F) Squadron and achieved his

first choice of a second Harrier posting.

The story of Peter Squire's tour in command of 1 Squadron is something of an epic within which the centrepiece was his squadron's contribution to victory in the Falklands campaign of 1982. While the details of the squadron's deployment and operations have been recorded on tape by Peter, and in books both historical and autobiographical, the sum of the problems that confronted his leadership were indeed formidable.

Peter and five other pilots who flew their aircraft from the *Atlantic Conveyor* to the aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes* had no previous experience of carrier operations. Moreover, their Harrier's navigation and weapons aiming system could not be aligned on the carrier's moving deck, so it was back to map and stopwatch for all navigation and fixed sighting for weapons delivery.

Between 20th May, the day after their arrival on *Hermes*, and the end of hostilities on 13th June the squadron flew some 130 operational attack and recce sorties that included Peter dropping a laser-guided bomb on enemy positions, the first such attack by an RAF aircraft. Throughout Peter led from the front with great courage and characteristic determination flying 23 missions, surviving battle damage on a number of occasions, and a crash landing on a newly laid airstrip at Port San Carlos. While the quality of his leadership and courage were to be recognised with the award of a DFC, such distinction only partly reflected the steadfastness of his personal example that was subject to other pressures beyond those he experienced in closing with an enemy who shot down three of his original six aircraft and put a bullet through his canopy that narrowly missed his head.

In such circumstances it would not be unreasonable for the squadron to have expected a warm welcome on board and given every assistance to fulfil their wartime mission but this was not to be. While there is little merit in raking over the whys and wherefores of events that happened 36 years ago, in the context of Peter's life and professional reputation, it needs to be recorded that the Captain of *Hermes* had, to put it mildly, a distorted view of the RAF.

While No 1 Squadron's relations with their Sea Harrier counterparts were good, for eight weeks on board Peter had to tolerate the Captain's consistent antagonism. That he did so while leading his

squadron indicates the quality of his inner steel, so well disguised by his unassuming manner and his habitual grace when under pressure. He truly proved that he had a heart of oak.

Subsequent to the war it came as no surprise that within the next eleven years Peter was to advance to air rank through a succession of high profile appointments in the RAF chain of command and MOD Central Staffs. This was made at a time when the armed forces were enduring sharp cuts in defence spending while having to meet an increasing number of operational commitments. Peter's own operational experience, unique in the highest ranks of the Service at that time, and exposure in the MOD's Central Staff to political pressures, emanating principally from the Treasury, joined together to forge a formidable identity – one that was well capable of accommodating the many demands made on his leadership when, with a certain and justified inevitability, he was appointed CAS in April 2000.

Observers of his ascent to CAS were consistent in their judgement of Peter's all-round professionalism, his congeniality, his calmness under pressure and his concern for others that earned him respect and popularity in equal measure. And it is to his eternal credit that he kept both feet firmly planted on the ground. For certain his judgement of complex issues reflected more than integrity and common sense. His values and principles, the very core of his being, were deep rooted in his commitment to the Christian faith that was such a strong constant throughout his life.

As C-in-C Strike Command and then as CAS Peter was heavily involved in air operations over Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan as the RAF transformed into an expeditionary air force, deploying forces specifically structured to specific operational needs. Additionally, he made his own distinctive contribution to the development of national air power, in particular accelerated investment in unmanned air vehicles and improvement to UK air defences to respond to the threat of rogue aircraft. Meanwhile he remained acutely aware of sustained pressure on defence spending, notwithstanding a short-term increase that followed the events of 9/11 in America. In reality, the Armed Forces were consistently expected to punch above their weight when, in effect, they were being asked to punch above their budget.

Tensions arising from this anomaly inevitably impacted on more

than equipment and capability matters. Other major issues included the recruitment and retention in the Service of key personnel, deterioration in infrastructure and quality of life issues. Time precludes a detailed catalogue of the consequential challenges Peter faced but the wellbeing of our servicemen and women were always at the forefront of his concerns. He clearly identified that the training and retention of personnel, throughout all branches and trades of the Service, represented the biggest challenge that he had to face as CAS.

Peter's concerns were shared by his Chiefs of Staff colleagues and it is to their great credit that they retained a unity of approach and understanding that prevented unseemly inter-Service squabbling from which only one benefactor would ultimately emerge – the Treasury.

Indeed, Peter and his fellow chiefs became good friends who after retirement held annual reunions. On one such occasion, while the ladies undertook more gentle adventures, the men took to sea in a yacht for a trip along the east coast. On board were two Admirals, one faux Admiral in the form of a landlubber who had been Admiral of the Army Sailing Association, and Peter who was officially designated as a HANT – helpful and no trouble – in the sense he would not try to impress as an ace helmsman or navigator. In thick fog and trying to enter the mouth of the River Ore, and even with an ex-hydrographer on board, they went aground. Three Admirals looked embarrassed and glum. For his part, Peter the HANT, with customary coolness, went below and brewed everyone a cup of coffee. And with customary generosity of spirit he had the grace not to mention the maritime adage that the most useless things on board a yacht are admirals and a wheelbarrow.

When Peter handed over to his successor in August 2003 he left behind the legacy and example of punctilious devotion to duty hallmarked by unfailing courtesy, inherent decency and impeccable manners that are the emblems of a true gentleman. Thereafter his life in retirement was one of energetic activity involving at various times the Imperial War Museum, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Maritime Air Trust, the Cranwellian Association, the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust, the Air League, the RAF Club, the governance of Kings School Bruton and by no means least, Presidency of the Devon and Somerset Wing of the Air Training Corps. Each and every one of these organisations were to benefit from

Peter's abiding commitment to 'Example through Endeavour'.

For the greater part of his long and distinguished career there was one important and enduring devotion in Peter's life, his abiding love for his family, Carolyn, Christopher, Richard and Edward. A family that is now much extended through the marriages of Peter and Carolyn's sons and the birth at the last count of six grandchildren in whose achievements Peter took so much pride and pleasure.

For all of us here it has been a true privilege to join you in this service of commemoration and celebration, a service of tribute to, and admiration of, the life of a most distinguished servant of the Royal Air Force and Nation. A life within which his courage, his integrity, his modesty, his gift for friendship along with his love for the Service and his family formed the foundations of his enduring devotion to duty. And this will remain an example to all of us who share Sir Peter Squire's steadfast pride in the Royal Air Force. We salute his memory.

ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Registered Charity No 299029

THE SOCIETY'S POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect on 25 May 2018. It has implications for how we handle your data and how we communicate with you in the future.

The Royal Air Force Historical Society (RAFHS) takes all reasonable steps to ensure that data collected about its members is treated confidentially. Your Committee believes that we comply with current data protection legislation. However, since 25 May 2018 we have been obliged to tell you how the RAFHS handles your personal data and to explain how the changes will affect you and your relationship with the RAFHS in the future.

The Society's Policy on Data Protection

Personal data is any information about you which allows us to identify you. The RAFHS keeps some or all of the following personal data about you:

- Your name and title
- Your address
- Your phone number and/or mobile phone number where you have provided one
- Your email address where you have provided one
- Your past experience, or special interests, if provided when applying for membership of the RAFHS
- Details of membership subscriptions and voluntary donations you have paid
- Details of any events you may have attended and payments you have made for admission

- In addition, we may have retained mails that you have sent to book events or ask questions about the Society and its activities.
- We may hold ID photographs of you for use in the Journal and/or taken at RAFHS events.

How we hold your personal data.

Your personal data is stored, password protected, on PCs/laptops operated by members of the RAFHS Committee on a 'need to know' basis: that means information is routinely held only by the Membership Secretary, the Treasurer and the Editor, but may also be accessed, via them, by the President, Chairman and any Committee member organising an event.

Some of our records, such as membership forms and subscription details, are also retained in paper format and are held securely by the Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

We keep the information for as long as we deem necessary within the remit of the legislation. Membership details will be retained for as long as you are a member. We may also need to keep financial information for a period of six financial years after the end of the financial year in which the transaction occurred so that we can respond to any enquiries from official bodies such as HMRC.

We shall assume that you accept this policy unless we hear to the contrary from yourself.

BOOK REVIEWS

Note that the prices given below are those quoted by the publishers. In most cases a better deal can be obtained by buying on-line.

The Birth of the RAF, 1918: The World's First Air Force by Richard Overy. Allen Lane; 2018. £14.99

Professor Richard Overy is a very well-known military historian with a track record of producing some exceptional works on, primarily, European air power. His *Air War 1939-1945, Why the Allies Won, The Bombing War 1939-1945* and *The Battle of Britain: Myth and Reality* are just some of the titles that have become standard authoritative texts. His work is equally accessible to casual readers as it is to academic audiences. It is all immaculately researched, beautifully written and invariably well presented. This slim volume of just 150 pages is no exception to these general comments. In a clear and succinct manner Overy tells the story of the birth of the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918, outlines the rationale for an independent Service and gives an overview of the subsequent fight for survival against the almost incessant carping from the Royal Navy and the army in the early inter-war years.

Even the most casual examination of the literature and the archival sources on the formation of the RAF will clearly show that the driving force, initially, was the need to eradicate the almost ruinous competition between the army and the navy for suitable aircraft, engines and associated aeronautical equipment. The War Office and the Admiralty were at each other's throats and Overy makes very clear that nothing short of an independent Air Ministry of equal status would help to solve the problem; the various attempts at Joint Air War Committees and Boards were powerless to broker agreement.

Overy goes on to show that the second factor in stimulating the demands for an independent air service was the German decision to launch air attacks against the UK mainland, first with airships and later with increasingly large fixed wing aircraft. He details the various phases of the raiding and sets out the political clamour for action to be taken to protect London, its suburbs and schools and other towns. The navy, through the Royal Naval Air Service, had failed to provide this protection even though guarding the coast was one of its traditional

duties. When the responsibility was handed over to the Royal Flying Corps, the situation did not improve and the political demand grew more strident for something to be done. The UK based casualties were not huge in number, especially in comparison with the carnage on the Western Front. The military leaders were reluctant to re-prioritise resources for the seemingly hopeless task of finding small numbers of marauding German bombers and the issue of home defence became what Overy describes as yet another episode in the ongoing contest between the military and political hierarchies for control of the conduct of the war. The production and acceptance of the two Smuts Reports became a vital series of steps on the road to 1 April 1918.

As Overy makes clear, not all were in favour of a separate air force. There is supreme irony in the fact that Hugh Trenchard, destined to become the almost mythical 'Father of the RAF', was one of the most adamant in preventing any deviation from supporting Haig and the army whether on the offensive, in the trenches or on the run. Overy chronicles the debates, the archival sources and subtleties of the political machinations with consummate skill, economy and clarity. In a similar vein, the same skills are evident in his treatment of the assumption of Trenchard to the position of Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), his resignation and replacement by Sykes and his subsequent reinstatement by Churchill. Overy is careful to stick to archival evidence and does not venture into the speculative issues that have so dogged previous accounts. In the midst of the clamour for reprisals on Germany for their bombing of the UK, the decision was taken to form an Independent Force equipped with the necessary bombers. This never really worked and Overy shows Trenchard's hand in subverting the force from its intended use to continue to support the army.

There is a mass of literature on the establishment of the Imperial policing role for the RAF and the ensuing battles between the services for resources, roles and primacy. Here Trenchard came into his own and steadfastly defended the new service. Overy again handles these aspects with considerable skill and with commendable brevity. He ranges across a spectrum of issues from the importance of the formation of a women's service within the RAF through petty naval objections to the flying of ensigns to the design and colour of uniforms.

Many of this Society's readers will undoubtedly be familiar with

the overall story, but not necessarily all of it. They may also have imbibed a number of myths and tales! As a one stop, authoritative and easy to read survey, this book cannot be too highly recommended.

Air Cdre Peter Gray

RAF 100 by James Holland. André Deutsch; 2018. £25.00.

And still they come – 'Centenary' books. This one is a 224-page A4-ish hardback. Attractively laid out, and making extensive use of colour, it is well illustrated with more than 200, mostly familiar, photographs. Attempting to cover 100 years in 224 pages means that the author has had to be selective, of course, and this reviewer would not take issue with most of the chosen topics or the overall balance. That said, in view of the space constraint, one does wonder whether there was sufficient 'RAF content' to have warranted a whole page being devoted to the loss of the DH 110 at the 1952 SBAC Show and another to the Fairey FD 2. Nevertheless, such issues aside, so far so good but, sadly, it is all downhill from there.

It can be only surmise, of course, but my guess is that the book was put together at such short notice that there was insufficient time for it to be independently proof read. We have, for instance, a photograph of Philip Joubert de la Ferté, which is actually of Lord Rothermere (p26), a picture of Robert Watson-Watt captioned as Keith Park (p68), of female ATA pilots identified as WAAFs (p72) and on p30 there is a picture of an RE8 of No 15 (not 12) Sqn. There are other seriously flawed captions, like a well-known IWM picture of an early Liberator, AM922, low over the sea, approaching the Northern Irish coast to land at Aldergrove, which is, inexplicably described as being from Maxwell AFB, Alabama at 'high altitude in the clouds' (p113) and a shot of Hurricanes, plainly at Ta'Qali, is captioned as being at Luqa (p107). Another shows a downed Bf 109 being examined by a pair of 'officers' who are clearly sergeants (p101). The Dakota did not carry 'the bulk of supplies' to Berlin in 1948-49 (p154). A picture of a Lancaster, dropping an UPKEEP weapon over the sea in daylight, is said to have been taken 'during the raid on the dams' – at night?! (p137) and the Blue Steel 'nuclear armed missile' on p184 is plainly an inert training round. But the prize must surely go to a Fairey FD 2 identified as a Puma helicopter (p176).

Sadly, this sort of thing is not confined to captions and, typos

Seen here being recovered from a forced landing, following its post-war recovery to the USA, this is one of the pair of YP-80As (44-83029) that had been deployed to Italy in January 1945. (Bob Esposito)

aside, there are numerous errors within the text. For example, the distance to the horizon from an altitude of 3,000 feet is less than 70 miles, not 150 (p45). Reproduced on p51, Appendix 1 to Expansion Scheme A of July 1934 clearly shows that the Metropolitan Air Force was projected to have 84 squadrons and 960 aircraft, but the descriptive passage, on the facing page, says that these figures were to be 75 and 1,252 respectively! The effect of sand is erosive, not corrosive (p198), and it is simply not true to say that the Americans 'had produced no jet aircraft' during WW II (p158). They had built 50-odd Bell P-59s, prototypes of two other designs and four early examples of a fourth, Lockheed's P-80, were in Europe by January 1945, two in Italy and two in the UK. Even names are incorrect – Maurice (should be Marcel) Dassault; Nikolai (should be Nikita) Khrushchev; Sir Richard Pierce (should be Peirse) and 'infamous' (rear cover) seems a really odd choice of adjective with which to describe the Battle of Britain. I could go on – and on, but that is, I think sufficient.

Unfortunately, this book is subtitled, *The Official Story* and is emblazoned with the 'RAF100' logo. This presumably indicates some sort of formal endorsement by the air force establishment but, if so, it

is a little half-hearted as there is a cautionary note to the effect that 'the views expressed […] do not necessarily represent those of' HMG, the MOD or the RAF. That was a very wise disclaimer.

This book was well-conceived, and it did have the potential to hit its mark but, sadly, through carelessness and/or a woeful lack of attention to detail, it missed. Unfortunately, it provokes so many double-takes that it is difficult to recommend it; it is certainly not one for members of this Society.

CGJ

From Spitfire Cockpit to the Cabinet Office by Air Cdre John Langer. Pen & Sword; 2016. £19.99.

Air Cdre John Langer's career was eventful to say the least. This autobiography is a fascinating and informative journey through his schooldays and his life and career in the RAF and afterwards.

He joined the RAF in 1943, gaining his wings and a commission in Miami on 6 February 1944. His operational career was to start, not with fighters, as recommended, but with gliders, because there was then a surplus of pilots and a shortage of engines! His glider operations were in India and Burma, which involved the prior completion of the Jungle Self-Preservation Training course. Accounts of the whole experience are graphic and amusing, both operationally and socially. The end of the war meant joining Air HQ Bombay, at a time when anti-colonial feelings were starting to run high.

Returning to the UK in 1947, he had his first experience of Spitfires – writing that one's first flight in a Spitfire was like losing one's virginity. From earlier passages in the book, Johnny would appear to have been qualified to make that comparison . . . He moved on to Tempest IIs in Germany with 33 Squadron at Gütersloh. The Station Commander, 'Splinters' Smallwood, recommended Johnny for the Day Fighter Leader School at West Raynham. Life then moved to the Far East and Malaya, at the time of the Malayan emergency. Contacts there were to become significant as Johnny's career progressed.

Back in the UK, he was posted to CFS to train as a QFI. Having married Jane, he returned to Singapore in 1954 as a training officer with the Singapore Squadron of the Malayan Auxiliary Air Force.

During that tour he was introduced to, and became good friends with, a young politician – Lee Kuan Yew.

Having returned to the UK in 1956, Johnny did at last get back on fighters, Hunter F4s and another Day Fighter Leader Course (was he the only student to do that course twice, previously flying Spitfires and Meteors?) before a tour as OC 43 Sqn at Leuchars, culminating in the award of an AFC and promotion to wing commander. His next appointment, in 1959, was as OC Cadet Wing at Henlow, to take on the job of officer training. I was then a Technical Cadet and can bear witness to the Boss drinking a yard of ale; 'Lead from the Front' was the wing commander's policy.

Interspersed with sundry courses, the 1960s included a tour as Chief Instructor at the CFS and air staff posts at HQ Flying Training Command and with HQ AFCENT at Fontainebleau. In January 1970 Johnny was appointed Station Commander at Valley, followed by a stint as Deputy Director Air Plans 1. In 1973, he was loaned to the Singapore Armed Forces as Director Air Staff, with the rank of air commodore; the Prime Minster, of course, was – Lee Kuan Yew! Air Cdre Langer's final RAF appointment was as Director of Flying Training, from which he retired in September 1979.

Subsequently, as an Aviation Security Advisor to Government, he was a frequent advisor to the Cabinet Office Briefing Room. He was also appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for Greater London, with responsibilities for Heathrow and Northolt, which sometimes involved personal exchanges with members of the Royal Family as they arrived or departed.

Throughout this autobiography there is a frank, refreshing and revealing commentary on service life in all respects – both good and bad. Many members of this Society may find amusement and resonance in Johnny's recollections of 'the system' – and names are used without fear or favour. I recommend the book as a very personal and a very readable picture of life that we may have known and, for some, to have been in that picture.

Wg Cdr John Stubbington

The Man Who Built The Swordfish by Adrian Smith. (I B Tauris; 2018). £25.00

Sir Richard Fairey was one of the giants of early British aviation

with status and influence comparable to such contemporaries as Frederick Handley Page, Geoffrey de Havilland and Tommy Sopwith. Like them, he was an engineer, an industrialist, an innovator and an entrepreneur who would become a pillar of the aviation establishment. Apart from being second only to Hawker, in terms of numbers of aircraft produced during the inter-war years, he was Chairman of the SBAC 1922-24 and President of the RAeS 1930-34 and he remained active and influential within both organisations throughout his working life. Another major contribution was his membership of the wartime British Air Commission in Washington from 1940, which he subsequently presided over as Director General from 1942 until the end of the war.

Born in 1887, the collapse of his father's business meant that Fairey was brought up in genteel Edwardian poverty. Having studied maths and physics in the evenings for two years, in 1904 he became a Fellow of the City and Guilds of London Institute – that was his formal technical qualification. By 1911 he had been taken on by the Short brothers who were building a series of aeroplanes progressively refining a basic Farman design. He rose rapidly and soon became what amounted to the chief engineer of the Admiralty's prime aero contractor and by the time that war broke out he was works manager for the new Shorts plant at Rochester. But Fairey was ambitious and in 1915, having undertaken to build twelve Short 827 seaplanes for the RNAS, Fairey Aviation was established as an independent Admiralty contractor. A subsequent order for 100 Sopwith 1½ Strutters consolidated the company and permitted Fairey to begin designing aircraft, mostly seaplanes, of his own. The most successful of these was the Type III and, as the IIIC, IIID and IIIF, and the derivative Gordon and Seal, this series established Fairey's reputation and kept the factory occupied throughout the 1920 and early '30s.

But this book is not about aeroplanes. They are all acknowledged as the story progresses so, along with the occasional reference to more obscure types, the Battle, Swordfish, Albacore, Barracuda, Firefly and Gannet all attract appropriate comment. Similarly, the post-war essays into guided missiles (Fireflash), rotary winged aircraft (Gyrodyne and Rotodyne) and delta-winged research, especially the FD 2, are also given some space, but only in passing. The author's focus is very much on the man, and his commercial enterprise; the significance of

the machines is not what the RAF and FAA did with them, but how they affected the company's fortunes and associated issues, notably its market value and the dividends it yielded.

There are a handful of oddities, for example; the pioneer naval aviator Charles Samson, has his name rendered as Sansom on at least a dozen occasions; Oliver Swan is named Oswald (p61) and John Salmond as Ian (p117); on p59 the Short 827 and the Short 184 are presented as being synonymous, whereas they were quite different types; and Notes 20, 24, 31 and 53 to Chapter 3 all refer, in error, to C H Barnes' book on Shorts Aircraft (in the Putnam series) rather than H A Taylor's companion volume on Fairey Aircraft.

Such anomalies aside, the research is impressive. Of this hardback's 480 pages, no fewer than 100 are given over to Notes and another 28 to the index. The text is typo-free and the prose immaculate, although I did find that the exposition could sometimes be excessive, several pages at a time being devoted to tangential background issues during which one tends to lose sight of the man himself.

Nevertheless, the picture that emerges is of an opinionated, strong-willed individual who became extremely wealthy and who enjoyed his wealth. A great deal of space is devoted to the financial side of the business, to relationships with family members and with colleagues, many of whom served the firm faithfully for many years. Richard Fairey was a very successful man of his time and of his 'class' and, perhaps unsurprisingly, he had little time for organised labour and was impatient with ministerial bureaucracy and the author makes no attempt to play down these traits, so his appraisal feels fair and unbiased. Adrian Smith's biography is a worthy, and well-balanced, tribute to a remarkable man.

CGJ

Fuel, Fire and Fear by Colin Pateman. Fonthill; 2018. £25.00.

Sub-titled *RAF Flight Engineers at War*, this 208-page hardback sets out to sharpen the focus on one of the less publicised of the fourteen aircrew categories sponsored by the RAF by VE-Day. The first cohorts of flight engineers were volunteer ground tradesmen in 1941, many of them ex-Halton apprentices, but from mid-1943 onwards the majority were direct entrants. The book's opening

chapters explain the origins of the trade and provide an overview of training. Thereafter the tale is told by reviewing, in varying degrees of depth, the experiences of about fifty individuals who, between them, provide an impression of what it was like to fly in Stirlings, Halifaxes, Lancasters, Catalinas, Sunderlands and Liberators. They include brief notes on all nineteen flight engineers who participated in the Dams Raid and an account of the incident that resulted in the award of a VC to Sgt Norman Jackson. The final chapter is somewhat tangential but it does provide an interesting insight into the 'quota' system that governed the award of wartime decorations.

The book is obviously well-intended, and the author has succeeded in his aim of highlighting the vital contribution made by the flight engineer. That being the case, one is reluctant to criticise his efforts but there are some errors in the text, which indicates a certain lack of familiarity with RAF history and terminology. The publisher may be excused for not noticing these, of course, but Fonthill must surely accept responsibility for the many grammatical flaws within, and the overall style of, the prose that appears under their imprint. Did anyone read the original manuscript? Did anyone proof read the galleys?

While this reviewer is sympathetic to the subject matter, be warned that you may find it an uncomfortably lumpy read.

CGJ

Javelin Boys by Steve Bond. Grub Street; 2017. £20.00.

During twelve years of service in the front line from 1956 to 1968, and with nine different marks to its name, the Javelin initially provided night/all weather air defence of the UK, Germany and Cyprus. Deployments followed to Zambia in response to the Rhodesian UDI crisis and finally to Singapore during the Indonesian confrontation that was to conclude the Javelin's contribution to RAF history.

Steve Bond's *Javelin Boys* draws on the memories of aircrew and engineers alike to present a masterful assembly of facts and anecdotes that embrace all elements of Javelin operations at home and abroad. Personal reminiscences paint in the fine detail of how the Javelin operated in different theatres that provides perspective to three other books about the Javelin previously published. In particular Chapter 5 recording the recollections of Riggers, Sooties, Leckies, Plumbers and

Fairies adds a much needed further dimension to my own knowledge of the aircraft. It follows that *Javelin Boys* merits the attention of newcomers to the Javelin and anyone else with an interest in expanding their knowledge of the aerodynamic and operating eccentricities of a unique aircraft.

The book itself is a superb publication. While many pages are illustrated with 'snapshots' of the aircraft and people, the central presentation of a wide range of colour photos illuminates the whole book and indeed the story of the aircraft. Moreover, I have seldom read a more convincing and truthful preface than that which flows from the pen of Group Captain John Palmer – worth a read in its own right, as does 'Introduction and Acknowledgements' written by Steve Bond. Together they set the scene for an enthralling read that I thoroughly recommend.

ACM Sir Richard Johns

Luftwaffe Eagle by Erich Sommer. Grub Street; 2018. £20.00.

Sub-titled *A WW II Airman's Story*, apart from the fact that he was a German, two things make this one stand-out from the many memoirs penned by wartime aviators. First, he began his career as a navigator and secondly, having retrained as a pilot, he flew the remarkable Arado 234 – extensively.

Born in 1912, Sommer was studying to become a master brewer when he volunteered to join the *Luftwaffe* as a reservist. After five months of full-time training in 1937 he was qualified as a navigator and bomb-aimer and released to resume his civilian career. Called up in September 1939, he teamed up with a pilot, Horst Götz, who had been flying as a test pilot with the electronics firm Telefunken; Götz brought with him his wireless operator, Gert Albrecht. They were posted, as an all-NCO crew, to the He 111-equipped KGr100, which was developing, what would become, the wireless-based *X-Verfahren* blind bombing system. After participating in the invasion of Norway in the conventional bomber role, they spent the best part of a year carrying out raids, using the radio beam system, on targets in England. Commissioned in 1941, Sommer was transferred to the unit's training staff until June 1942 when he spent a month in Casablanca before re-joining his original crew on posting to a specialist unit flying the very high altitude (better than 40,000 feet) Ju 86R. They flew several

sorties over England, including the well-documented one that was intercepted, albeit inconclusively, by Prince Emanuel Galitzine on 12 September 1942. After a quiet spell in France, he rejoined Götz to spend four months in the Crimea flying anti-shipping reconnaissance missions over the Black Sea in radar-equipped Ju 88s.

On returning to Berlin in mid-1943, by now a very experienced flyer, he was consulted over the layout of the single-seat crew position in the mock-up of the Ar 234. He obliged, but suggested that he could be of even more use if he were a pilot (although unlicensed, he had already flown solo, originally under the unofficial tuition of a friendly colleague on KGr100 back in 1940 and in the Crimea he had been informally authorised by Götz to fly a spares run in a light aircraft). By 1944 he was a fully qualified pilot, based at Oranienberg and building up experience by ferrying a variety of aircraft and flying occasional photo reconnaissance missions in Ju 88s.

By mid-1944 the Ar 234 was flying in its original form (no undercarriage – rocket-assisted take off on a jettisonable trolley and land on skids) and Götz was appointed to command a unit provided with two of these early machines; Sommer was to be the other pilot. Operational sorties began in July and by October the trials aircraft had been replaced by the wheeled production model, the Ar 234B. In March 1945 Sommer was sent to northern Italy to command a unit of three Arados which operated successfully until its last aircraft was destroyed in late April. Thereafter the story ends with an account of the unit's retreat through the Alps, eventually to be detained by the Americans in a camp near Munich until June 1945.

In 1954 Sommer settled in Australia where he set up a successful business as a builder. Following his retirement in 1969, and assisted in his research by the well-known, and authoritative, historian of WW II German aviation, J Richard Smith, he began to write the original draft of this book. He died in 2005 but, before being submitted for publication, the text was edited, simply to improve the syntax, by one of his daughters. With over 100 photographs drawn from Sommer's own albums and/or contributed by Smith, and his colleague Eddie Creek, the result is a very readable account of a remarkable flying career. There is almost nothing relating directly to the RAF, of course, but it is a classic example of the contrast between the way that the Allies operated – relatively brief operational tours, broadly defined by

time or sorties – and German policy – a great deal of crew continuity and virtually non-stop operational flying appointments. Sommer does not provide a total, but it was certainly in excess of 250 sorties, about 50 of them on the Arado.

I really enjoyed this one, not least because of the insight it provides into the use of a rather impressive first-generation jet. Recommended. **CGJ**

The RAF Battle of Britain Fighter Pilot's Kitbag by Mark Hillier. Frontline Books; 2018. £14.99.

This well-presented 115-page squarish (19 × 25 cms) softback has been printed on coated paper to ensure the best possible reproduction of the illustrations – and the book is really all about the pictures. The first part of the sub-title, '*Uniforms & equipment from the summer of 1940*' is a good description of the content but that is less true of the second part '*and the human stories behind them.*' Some notes relating to individuals do occasionally crop up in passing, particularly in captions to photographs, but this book is primarily about kit, not people.

The equipment aspect is handled extremely well with something like 180 photographs, mostly of museum-quality contemporary pieces of kit, in colour – flying overalls, life-saving jackets, parachute harnesses, flying helmets, goggles, boots, tin hats, pistols, uniforms, badges, log books, maps and all the other paraphernalia that a fighter pilot might require. Among the latter I was surprised to find a picture of the 1939 edition of King's Regulations and Air Council Instructions (AP 958) accompanied by a note to the effect that all officers of the GD Branch were to have a copy of this *and* of the Manual of Air Force Law (AP 804), the RAF Pocket Book (AP 1081), both parts of the RAF War Manual (APs 1300 and 1301) and Part 1 of the Flying Training Manual (AP 129). I checked with KRs&ACIs only to find that it was true! – there were similar lists for officers of other branches. Keeping that lot amended up-to-date must have been an almost full-time job, but I don't recall ever coming cross anyone mentioning this incessant chore in a wartime memoir. Although it was still extant in the 1942 edition, this regulation (KR2352) must surely have been one of those 'more honoured in the breach than in the observance' – the cost in paper alone would have been enormous. But

I digress.

Problems? One last read-through of the proofs would have picked up a handful of residual typos. A personal bugbear of mine is the use of 'brevet' to describe a flying badge – while this may be commonplace in crew room *patois*, I think correct terminology ought to be used in a reference book such as this. The only other oddity is the use of 'UHF' to describe a 1939-model Type 19 microphone. Apart from the fact that microphones are not frequency-sensitive, the wireless set in use at the time was the HF TR9 which had been largely replaced by the VHF TR1133 by the end of the Battle – UHF did not become commonplace until the 1960s. But none of these marginal issues detract significantly from an interesting and attractively laid out essay. A little esoteric perhaps, but none the worse for that.

CGJ

ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Royal Air Force has been in existence 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 interwar 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, Wg Cdr Colin Cummings, October House, Yelvertoft, NN6 6LF. Tel: 01788 822124.

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 British 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 MSc MBIFM MinstAM
2009	Gp Capt A J Byford MA MA
2010	Lt Col A M Roe YORKS
2011	Wg Cdr S J Chappell BSc
2012	Wg Cdr N A Tucker-Lowe DSO MA MCMI
2013	Sqn Ldr J S Doyle MA BA
2014	Gp Capt M R Johnson BSc MA MBA
2015	Wg Cdr P M Rait
2016	Rev (Sqn Ldr) D Richardson BTh MA PhD
2017	Wg Cdr D Smathers

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
Wing Commander C G Jefford MBE BA

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