

THE RUNNING
HORSE TAVERN

*The Club's pub
undergoes stunning
transformation*

FOOD GLORIOUS
FOOD!

*Executive Chef Elliot
Plimmer looks to
tantalise taste buds*

128

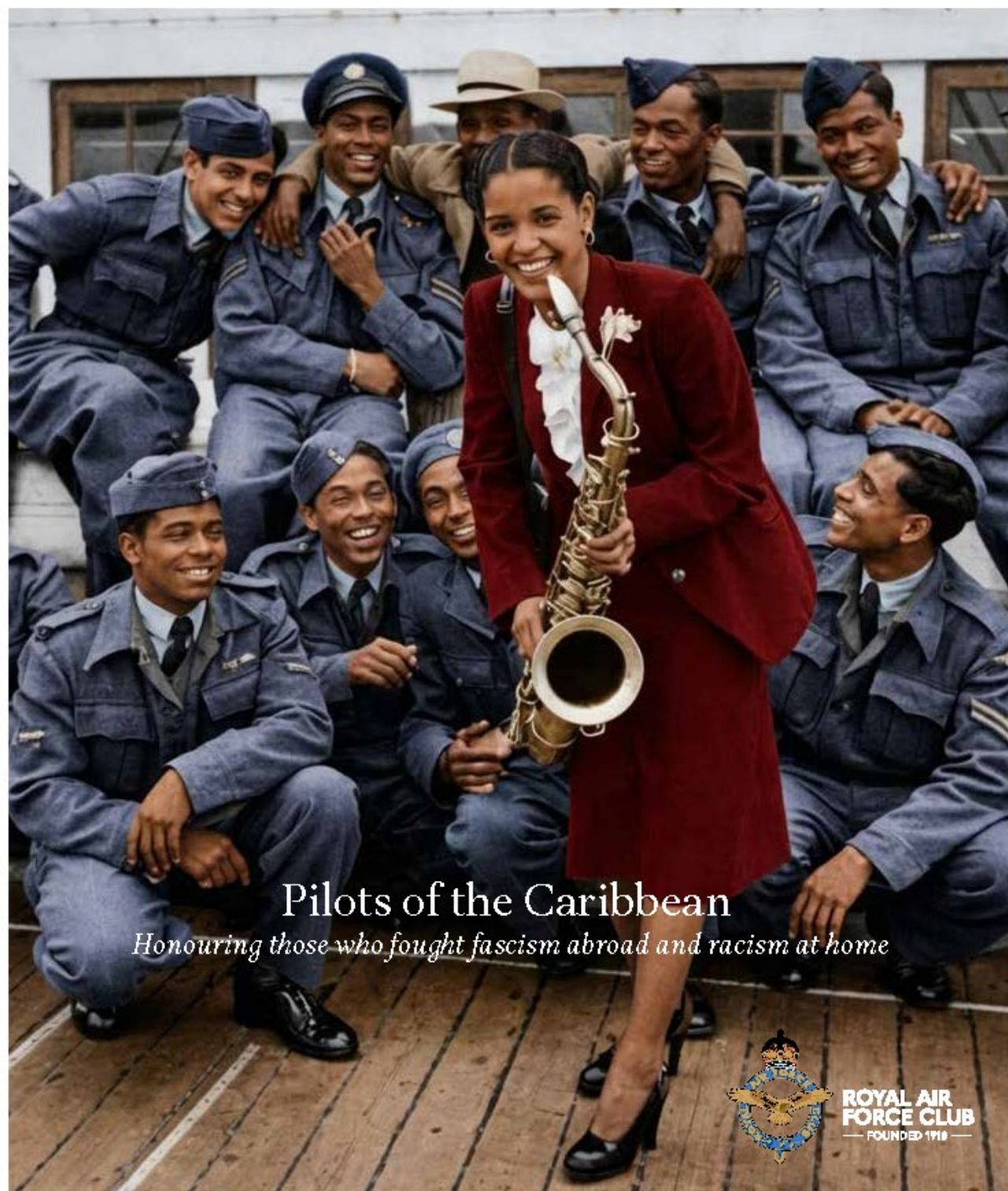
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"A BLOODY GOOD
NAVIGATOR"

*Pushing aircraft
and endurance to
their limits*

FRIENDS OF
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*Generous donations
sustaining the
Club's future*

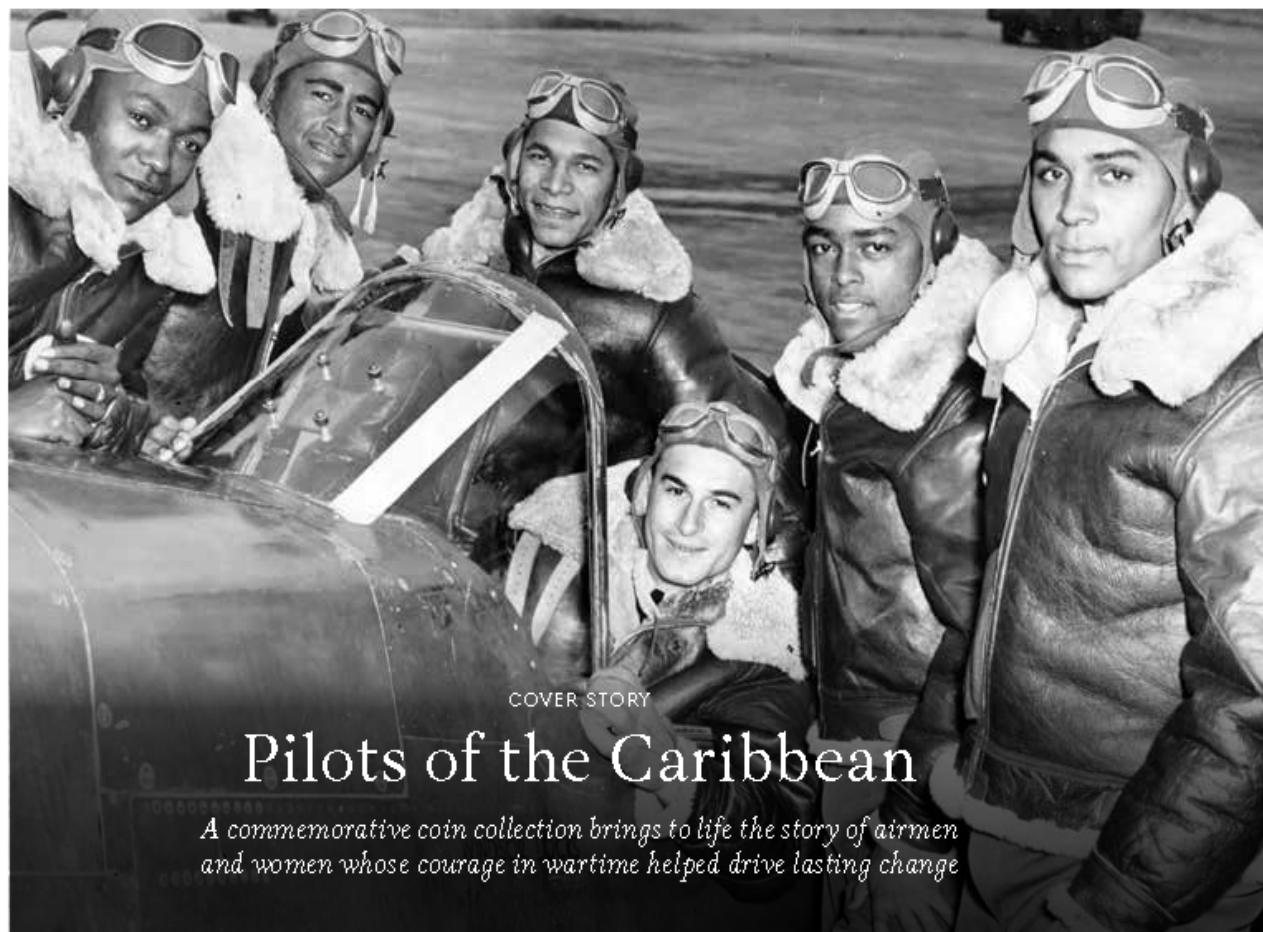


Pilots of the Caribbean

Honouring those who fought fascism abroad and racism at home



ROYAL AIR
FORCE CLUB
— FOUNDED 1918 —



Pilots of the Caribbean

A commemorative coin collection brings to life the story of airmen and women whose courage in wartime helped drive lasting change

When Jesse Owens sprinted and leapt to four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, he did more than humiliate Hitler on his own stage. A Black American athlete, cheered by ordinary Germans, he overturned Nazi myths of racial superiority in a matter of seconds. He inspired comic-book heroes like Superman, helped with recruitment when war came, and became a living symbol that courage and excellence know no colour.

The new "Pilots of the Caribbean, Tuskegee Airmen and Heroes of African Heritage" collector coin-set takes that same spirit of defiance into the skies. Struck in a 24ct gold finish and incorporating an original piece of a 1941 **RollsRoyce** Merlin engine – the heart of the Spitfire, Lancaster, Mosquito and later North American Mustang P51D – the coins honour the Black men and women of the Caribbean, the United

States and Africa who fought fascism abroad and racism at home. It was they who came back from war to campaign for civil rights for all in Britain with the Race Relations Act, and in America with the Civil Rights Voting Act, both in 1965.

The RAF's Caribbean story stretches back to the First World War with men like Sergeant William Robinson Clarke of Jamaica

These men and women (through their training and duty) tell a story that is still too little known in RAF history.

The RAF's Caribbean story stretches back to the First World War with men like Sergeant William Robinson Clarke of Jamaica, Britain's first Black pilot who had defied the 'colour bar' and flew with the Royal Flying Corp. one year before the official creation of the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918. By the time of the Second World War 10,270 Jamaicans,

800 Trinidadians, 417 British Guianese, and over 1,000 other men from Barbados, Bermuda, the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands and more had enlisted in the British forces. Around 6,000 of them joined the RAF directly.

They came from islands that were already crucial to the war effort: Jamaica and British Guiana supplying bauxite; Trinidad & Tobago, oil; British Honduras (Belize), timber; all the islands provided food and raw materials.

War was raging in the Caribbean Sea from the very start, with German U-boats sinking a huge amount of British ships that were crucial to the war supply chain. Caribbean newspapers such as the Jamaican Gleaner even launched the "Spitfire Fund", complete with a wartime comic to rally donations across the Empire. Much of the money raised went to **RollsRoyce** and Bentley Crefactory that built the legendary Merlin. Companies like PA Consulting started by helping the British government fill the



From Left: Tuskegee Airmen; Sqn Ldr Ulric Cross, DSO DFC; Mona Baptiste onboard HMT Empire Windrush in 1948



employment gap and getting women trained and into the work place making munitions and aircraft. The war accelerated change and increased efficiency for the better.

From these much needed social changes emerged figures such as Squadron Leader Ulric Cross, DSO DFC, of 139 (Jamaica) Squadron, one of the most highly decorated Caribbean airmen, flying over 80 operations from RAF Marham in the elite Pathfinder role. Other Caribbean and African RAF personnel - Flight Lieutenants Billy Strachan (Jamaica), Arthur Wint (Jamaica), Cy Grant (Guyana), Emanuel Adeniyi Thomas (Nigeria) and Johnny Smythe (Sierra Leone) - endured combat, captivity and discrimination, then spent peacetime campaigning for equality and justice. Grant, shot down and paraded by the Nazis as a "prisoner of indeterminate race", and Smythe (also captured), later a leading figure in the Windrush story, exemplify the courage that continued long after the last combat mission.

America was reluctant to join the war until the bombing of Pearl Harbour (Hawaii) on 7th December 1941. A day later, the USA officially entered the war and started to disburse their troops to Europe.

Tuskegee Airmen

Across the Atlantic, Black Americans faced the full force of segregation and Jim Crow laws. The US Army Air Force confined them to a separate unit - the **now legendary** Tuskegee Airmen of the 99th Fighter Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group. Flying P51D Mustangs (and other types) in Europe and North Africa, they escorted bombers, including B17 Flying Fortresses, and built a combat record so strong that it helped puncture the logic of segregation

Across the Atlantic, Black Americans faced the full force of segregation and 'Jim Crow' laws

in the US military. Their story later inspired George Lucas's film *Red Tails*. Terry Jervis (TV producer and former RAF commercial agent) created the *Pilots of the Caribbean* exhibition with the RAF Museum and Black Cultural Archives, also worked on the promotion of that film and met many of the surviving Tuskegee veterans. He also created this magnificent coin collection box-set.

Between 150,000 and 240,000 African American servicemen were stationed in Britain between 1942 and 1945. They encountered Black British, Caribbean and African RAF personnel for the first time, often discovering they faced the same barriers in different uniforms. The RAF had, by contrast, formally abolished its colour bar in 1909; by June 1944, an Air Ministry order stated:

"All ranks should clearly understand that there is no colour bar in the Royal Air Force... any instance of discrimination on the grounds of colour... should be immediately and severely checked."

The US military's segregation remained in force on American bases in Britain - and Caribbean aircrew did not hesitate to challenge it, particularly when Black American GIs were harassed for speaking to or dancing with white women which was accepted by British norms in the many pubs and dancehalls around the country.

Women on the Front Line

Women feature prominently on the coins, as they did in the war itself. They stepped into factories, fields, civil defence, transport and special operations. Many more offered another vital service that is often overlooked: morale.

Women in Uniform

Black women in Britain volunteered in civil defence as firewatchers, factory workers and nurses. After the colour bar in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) was lifted in 1943, Caribbean women including Nadia Cattouse, Norma Best and Connie Mark enlisted. Lilian Bader, born in Liverpool to a Barbadian father who had served in the First World War, joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in 1941 and trained as an aircraft technician - a rare and demanding role for any woman, let alone a Black woman navigating prejudice (see Stephen Bourne's book *"War to Windrush"* for reference).

Forces Sweethearts Beyond Vera Lynn

Most readers will know singer Vera Lynn, *We'll Meet Again* and *The White Cliffs of Dover*, and the famous Hollywood American stars - Rita Hayworth, Judy Garland, Doris Day and the Andrews Sisters. Their voices carried across the wireless and into Nissen huts, messes and dugouts. Less remembered are the Black women whose songs and performances lifted spirits from the Americas to London and Lagos:

- Lena Horne - Hollywood actress and singer of *Stormy Weather*, who toured US bases and became a glamorous symbol of hope for many African American servicemen. 🌟

- Ella Fitzgerald – jazz icon whose voice was as effective as any medicine against fear and fatigue.
- Josephine Baker – not only a celebrated dancer and singer in France, but also a member of the Resistance and an Allied intelligence asset.
- Adelaide Hall and Elisabeth Welch – Black entertainers based in Britain, constantly on stage for troops and civilians alike.
- Una Marson – Jamaican feminist and writer, who from 1941 presented and produced the BBC radio programme *Calling the West Indies*, keeping Caribbean audiences informed and connected to the war effort.

These women were not simply "sweethearts". They were professionals deliberately deployed to steady nerves, brighten lives and remind men and women in uniform what they were fighting for.

One of the coins captures that spirit directly: it shows RAF and Caribbean aircrew on the deck of HMT Empire Windrush in 1948, being entertained by singer Mona Baptiste, alongside Johnny Smythe and Terry Jervis's uncle, Oscar Gardner. The war was over, but the work of building new lives – and anew Britain – was only beginning.

Honouring a Shared Heritage

The official title of the coin set – *Pilots of the Caribbean, Tuskegee Airmen and Heroes of African Heritage* – is derived from the acclaimed exhibition created by Terry Jervis with the Royal Air Force Museum and the Black Cultural Archives in 2013. That exhibition brought the RAF Caribbean and African story out of the shadows, tracing it from the First World War through the Second, and on into the Windrush era.

Jervis' RAF connection goes back to 2000, when Club President Air Marshal Sir David Walker, then Director of Corporate Communications, brought him in to support the Service's rebranding and public profile following his role as a senior executive in charge of the BBC's Millennium Day global broadcast. Jervis grew up in postwar Britain, listening to



firsthand accounts from veterans and hearing of his uncle's journey from Jamaica to RAF service in 1943. Jervis' media career has since taken him around the world (having produced and directed shows such as *Top Gear*, TV specials with HM Queen Elizabeth II/Buckingham Palace and the Olympic Games 2012). His BBC career and role in with the RAF led to him documenting many of the wartime heroes and events which led to the creation of these coins.

The Bentley Car and Rolls-Royce

Bentley pioneered the use of the aluminium in piston engines and high-performance luxury racing cars. It was this feature which helped the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine and aircraft performance. Along with these coins, Legacy & Heritage Limited and Bentley – Jack Barclay are working with the Mulliner division to create 10 unique special edition cars based on the history of the RAF Pilots of the Caribbean and Tuskegee Airmen. The car will feature a unique 50mm gold Spitfire and Mustang P-51D medallion with the Rolls-Royce marque inside the

vehicle (representing the history of the two companies) making it the only vehicle in the two companies entire history to do so. These cars will only be made on request and feature many art-enriched pieces to the cock-pit styled fascia, seating and foot plates.

History You Can Hold

The coin set brings together commemorative coins, artefacts and stories celebrating the people and aircraft that shaped the air war.

Produced under Royal Warrant, the set includes gold finished coins honouring the Tuskegee Airmen and Pilots of the Caribbean, aviation inspired artwork, and a rare authenticated fragment of a Rolls Royce Merlin engine. Together, the collection recognises the shared courage, skill and innovation of men and women from across the Commonwealth, the United States and Allied nations.

In the spirit of Jesse Owens, they did not simply take part. They changed the race perspective and the fight for justice, freedom and democracy.

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