

"Never in the field of human conflict was so
much owed by so many to so few"

SCRAMBLE 194



Official Newsletter of the
Battle of Britain Historical Society 2013 Ltd



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Message from Your Editor

I hope this finds you all well.

It's been a very busy year for the Society, with the new website now up and running (see page 10). We have also completed the plaque presentations in Berkshire (see page 8) and Kent (see page 20).

Most Area Managers attended the Annual Dinner at the Union Jack Club on the 14th September; this is a very useful exercise with us being all together as a team – it has become a positive meeting, updating activities over the last year.

Thank you to all our Area Managers for your energy and commitment (see page 9).

Our President Lord Beaverbrook and Vice

President Wing Commander Chappell MBE were in attendance, I hope they were impressed with the work we all do.

To all our members thank you for your renewals and donations. If you are able to recruit a 'new' member it will be very helpful, maybe as a Birthday present or a Christmas gift, do give it a try, it is still only £24 per year, excellent value for the money!

We have a new member of 'The Few' – 84 years after the Battle of Britain. They still can be found (see page 10).

Enjoy this issue.

John Pulfer BEM, JP

Managing Director BoBHS



Front page:

Geoff Nutkin's painting "Spitfire over Kent Hopfields". Wing Commander Bob Doe DSO, DFC and Bar of 234 and 238 Squadron flying over hopfield workers in Kent during the summer of 1940.

Website: aviartnutkins.com. Tel: 01959 524416.

www.shoreham-aircraft-museum.co.uk



Back page:
Battle of Britain crash site memorials.
I am sure you will find these very emotive.
With your

support and previous donations we have helped to make this happen. These are a permanent reminder of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country in its time of need.



Grave Registrar's Column **Steve Maddock**

Sergeant Air Gunner John Keast, 600 Squadron



Francis John Keast from Swalecliffe, near Whitstable, Kent, was born on 18th November 1908 in Uxbridge, Middlesex the son of Arthur and Ann Keast.

He joined 601 Squadron Auxiliary Air Force around April 1936 then attended the No 7B (Fighter) Air Gunners Course 5B&GS Jerby then onto Tangmere, then posted to 600 Squadron at Manston, Kent. On 8th August Keast was a member of the crew of Blenheim L8665 shot down by a Me109 piloted by Oberlieutenant Sprick of 111/JG26. The pilot, F/O DN Grice, stayed at the controls to guide the burning aircraft away from Ramsgate, it crashed in flames into the sea off the town. All three on board the aircraft were killed: Flying Officer DN Grice, Sergeant FJ Keast and AC1 JBW Warren.

In 2006 John Rowe, a Regional Volunteer for the war memorial charity War Memorials Trust, felt the town of Ramsgate owed this crew a debt of gratitude. With local support from the Ramsgate Society, the Ramsgate Charter Trustees and the local branch of the Royal Air Force Association, fund-raising was commenced and efforts initiated to trace members of the crew's families. Unfortunately, in the event, only relatives of the air gunner Sgt Francis John Keast were traced and on the day of the unveiling 16 members of his family were in attendance.

The site of the former Ramsgate Hospital, which was being redeveloped into luxury apartments, was identified as an appropriate site for the memorial plaque.

The memorial plaque was designed by a local artist, Mr Denys Le Fevre FRSA, and made at a local stone masons in black slate with gold lettering. On the 3rd March 2006 Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhard, former leader of Kent County Council, unveiled the new Blenheim Memorial as a part of an overall ceremony at which the refurbished Peace Memorial was handed back formally to the people of Ramsgate. Members of Sgt Keast's family laid three wreaths, one for each of the crew members.

I would like to thank Ian Cressy, a Society Member for his work in visiting and tending the final resting place of Sgt Keast (aged 32) at Whitstable Cemetery.

Why not adopt a grave of one of the 'Few' in your area? Ring Steve on 07894 457665.

"WE NEED YOUR HELP URGENTLY"

It's that time again when I come looking for your help.

Will you, members of your family or friends, be able to take care of the final resting place of one of our Brave Boys.



Historian's Column **Nick Hall**

Battle of Britain Flypasts September 15th, 1945/1990

In this issue I highlight the commemoration of the Battle of Britain of September 1945 when Group Captain Bader DSO, DFC and Bar, led the fly-past over London as one of the 'Few' of 242 Squadron. Those who were to follow in formation included : Group Captain Adolf Sailor Malan DSO, DFC; Wing Commander Robert Stanford Tuck DSO, DFC; Group Captain Jamie Rankin DSO, DFC; Group Captain Peter Hugo DSO, DFC; and AVM Sir Harry Broadhurst KBE, CB, DSO, DFC.

With Bader and 242 Squadron leading the fly-past, it would see 21 RAF Squadrons totalling 240 aircraft which included Spitfires, Hurricanes, Mustangs, Hawker Tempests, Bristol Beaufighters, Mosquitos, Hawker Typhoons, Gloster Meteors and other types of jet-propelled aircraft. The route would see them fly over London and then the southern counties over which, five years earlier, the skies had been a hard-fought battle area; this conflict became known as the 'Battle of Britain' during the period 10th July to the 31st October 1940, culminating on the 15th September known as 'The Climax of the Battle of Britain'.

The Route

North Weald – Barking, West Ham, East India Dock, Hyde Park, Northolt, Ruislip, Elstree, Walthamstow, Greenwich, Wimbledon, Teddington, Brentford back to North Weald then Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

To honour of the 'Few', Trafalgar Square was illuminated on 15th September 1945.

In contrast to the fly-past in 1945, September 1990 saw the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain with a review by Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II outside Buckingham Palace with those other countries who fought with us during the Battle of Britain represented on parade. Those veterans who were able, paraded past the Queen, led by Wing Commander Pat Hancock Secretary and Treasurer of the Battle of Britain Fighter Association.

This was followed by a fly-past of 168 aircraft of the RAF over the palace to which the Queen would take the salute, led by AVM Wratten, Commanding Officer 11 Group flying a Battle of Britain Spitfire of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight at 500 feet at a speed of 80 knots. Squadrons who had fought in the Battle of Britain were presented flying an array of modern aircraft. The aircraft participating included Tornado GR4, F3, Buccaneer, Harrier, Phantom, VC10, Hercules and Chinook.

Shown on page 5 is a copy of the Post Office first day cover showing the Spitfire from the Battle of Britain piloted by AVM Wratten OC11 Group, below that is the VIP programme for the 50th anniversary fly-past over Buckingham Palace on 15th September 1990.



The Northern Battle of Britain Memorial

Grand Opening — Sunday 5th May 2024

On May 5th 2024 a lone Spitfire flew over the former RAF Doncaster in tribute to the men who died during the Battle of Britain. What is left of the station, once home to 616 Aux Sqn, is now the location of the South Yorkshire Aircraft Museum.

The BBMF flypast marked the Dedication of the new Northern Battle of Britain Memorial. It was the brainchild of Bill Bond MBE (founder of the Battle of Britain Historical Society) and the seeds were sown in 1995 just weeks after he witnessed the unveiling of the National monument he inspired on London's Victoria Embankment.

Bill felt passionately that we should keep the memory of 'The Few' alive through the creation of Memorials, not just in the South of England but across the country. Each one recognising the sacrifice made by the whole nation during 1940.

After searching for a national location he came across the Doncaster Museum and after meeting its Trustees a plan began to take shape. However after several false starts the project was relaunched as a charity in 2014 and reenergised with the introduction of a number of new Trustees.

The concept quickly changed in the light of the financial climate and a three phase concept was adopted. In Phase One a simple wall would be built to represent a revetment. This would form a backdrop to panels listing the Battle of Britain Roll of Honour.



Secondly an education project would provide visitors with a detailed account of the Battle and details of the role played by people and the RAF stations in

the north. Finally, the Museum has set aside a plot of land where it is proposed a replica Spitfire or Hurricane could be located, The Memorial would then be expanded within a full scale reconstruction of a WWII revetment.

With the help of the Battle of Britain Historical Society the Royal Air Force Historical Society, Doncaster Council, local building suppliers and many friends and partners sufficient funds were raised to construct Phase



Benjamin Lockwood (aged 7) is being advised by AVM (Retd) Alan T. Johnson (aged 93), on his interest in becoming a pilot when he becomes a young man.

THE NORTHERN BATTLE OF BRITAIN MEMORIAL



One of the Memorial. After months of hard work the volunteers and staff at the museum completed the building work at the end of April this year. During construction the Trustees heard of Ian Curran a local sculptor with a love for all things aviation. It was not long before he was commissioned to create models of a Spitfire and Hurricane that now fly above the Memorial, fashioned from sheet metal these aircraft have become a dynamic, poignant addition to the Memorial. On Sunday May 5th Patron of the Museum, retired Air Vice Marshal Alan T Johnson formally unveiled the Memorial. He was joined by AVM Richard Hill and RAF Air Cadets (RAFAC) from the South Yorkshire Wing. This was followed by a march past and a dedication Service by Padre Tom Brown attended by an audience of local dignitaries, supporters and members of the public.

The weather was fabulous, the speeches were inspirational and the VIPs were treated to many messages of support including one via a link to the West End from award winning actress and Joint Patron of the Memorial Sheridan Smith. The Trustees are now looking forward to delivering Phases Two and Three. If any members would like to assist with advice on developing the project or ideas for funding the replica aircraft we will be delighted to hear from you.

Article by: Howard Johnson Trustee NBOBM

The Battle of Britain Historical Society is proud to have played its part in the project, but, Stages Two and Three are still to be completed. If you feel this is a worthwhile cause and would like to make a donation the address is : Northern Battle of Britain Memorial Appeal, C/o Howard Johnson, 2 Park Avenue, Sprotbrough, Doncaster DN5 7LW, or direct to Virgin Money, account no 24170541, sort code 05 04 14. Please let them know you are a BOBHS member.



St Piran's School

Plaque presentation – Maidenhead Berkshire. 13th September 2024

A plaque unveiling ceremony in memory of two Battle of Britain pilots: Pilot Officer Michael Featherstone Briggs and Pilot Officer Robert Chippindall Dafforn DFC took place on Friday 13th September 2024 at St Piran's School Maidenhead, Berkshire. The plaque was unveiled by His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire Mr Andrew Try.

We were blessed with wonderful weather, everything went as planned. St Piran's Headmaster and his team fully embraced the planning of the presentation, this made it a very 'special' day. The service took place in the school chapel, the perfect venue for such an occasion. The brass plaque presented by the Battle of Britain Historical Society will be a parting memorial



Stephen Bristowe delivering his speech

of these two fighter pilots who attended the school. Hopefully the pictures tell their own story of the successful day. Families of both pilots were in attendance. A light buffet took place for those invited to end the presentation.

Article: Stephen Bristowe – Area Manager Berkshire



*His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire,
Mr Andrew Try arriving at the school*



*His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire,
Mr Andrew Try unveiling the plaque*

Area Managers' Annual Dinner

Union Jack Club, London – 14th September 2024

This annual event enables the Society's Area Managers and their guests to meet each other in a relaxed environment, at this appropriate military venue. Most were able to attend, just four were unavailable for various reasons.

We were privileged to have in attendance our President Lord Beaverbrook and Vice President, Wing Commander John Chappell MBE. The son of the founder of the Society, Peter Bond and the founder's grand-daughter Emma Bond were also in attendance. Ted McManus, Chief Executive of the Battle of Britain Monument, was also with us as the guest speaker, his knowledge of all things Battle of Britain is without question.

After the meal, John Pulfer, Managing Director, enlightened all attending on the excellent progress that has been made and hopefully will continue.



Updates were given by Jim Shearing, Webmaster and Steve Maddock, Graves Registrar, Ted McManus concluded by telling all of us about his work with the Battle of Britain Monument and he also spoke to us on the eligibility required to receive a Battle of Britain Clasp to become one of 'The Few'.

On the following morning, 'Battle of Britain Day' some of us attended the Monument on the Victoria Embankment to lay a Society wreath; the monument is in much better condition since Steve Maddock has been involved in the oversight of its maintenance programme.



*Our Society mascot was in attendance
Wing Commander Chappell MBE looks on*



*Battle of Britain Society's visit to the London
Monument on 15th September*

A New Member of 'The Few'

Sgt/Pilot Ronald Thomson

758072 British 616 Squadron

It is with much pleasure to announce on 26th September 2024 the Air Historical Branch, after having sight of Seargeant Pilot Ronald Thomson's Logbook, has decided to award him the Battle of Britain clasp. It is agreed that he was scrambled on an X-Raid on 20th



October 1940 as an operational sortie under Fighter Command and therefore qualifies.

The Society is waiting for further information to follow.



Jim Shearing – Website Manager

Jim has done a very good job in the oversight and production of the 'update' to the Society website. A special "Thank You" to him. He has asked me to include the following details for access to the members' pages, should

you still require to action this.

Dear Battle of Britain Historical Society Members:

I announced in the previous edition of *Scramble* (Spring/ Summer 2024 – issue 169) that we were developing a new website for the Society. We are pleased

to announce that the new site is now open and available for you to view and enjoy. You can find it at: <http://www.battleofbritainhistoricalsociety.org.uk>

Our new website will allow you to view an exclusive members' area, and we hope to have our online membership annual renewal facility functional by the renewal date of 1st August. We plan to add more content each month as time and resources allow. To view the Members' page of the website, you will first need to register. To do this go to the login page of our website, where you will see the display shown below:

Click on the register button – then we will issue you with a username and password, then you will be invited to change your password on your first login. Please be patient whilst we get used to this new system. We hope you will enjoy the new website, and please do suggest any improvements or things you would like to see – we have built this website for your enjoyment and education!

Jim Shearing
Website Manager
Battle of Britain Historical Society
Email:
bobhswebmanager@hotmail.com

Username or email

Password

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100 Years of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force

1924 – 2024

This year the Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF) celebrates its 100th anniversary. The operational needs of today's Royal Air Force and the support provided by its Reserve component are very different from those of 1924 and indeed 1940, and new chapters in its history continue to be written.

However, despite the changes throughout the past 100 years, one thing has remained constant, the professionalism, commitment and selfless dedication of the men and women of the RAuxAF, which is something to be justly proud of. This brief early history of the Auxiliary Air Force (AAF) focuses on the early years of the AAF, up to and including the Battle of Britain. The author's intent is to provide a separate article at a later date covering the post Battle of Britain period onwards.

The history of the Territorial and Auxiliary Forces dates back to the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907, and in November 1917, the Air Force (Constitution) Act was passed, which made provision for the creation of an Auxiliary Air Force (AAF). However, it was not until 1924, following the creation of the Royal Air Force in 1918, that Lord Trenchard's vision of civilians serving their country in flying squadrons in their spare time came into being through an Order in Council on 9th October 1924 (following an Act of Parliament of July 14, 1924, which extended to the AAF the provisions of the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907). By the following year the first AAF Squadrons were formed.

Following the gaining of support from local authorities and Territorial Associations, the original plan was to form 20 Squadrons; but it was wisely agreed to start with five Squadrons. They were to be located in the Counties of London and Warwickshire, and the Cities



Squadron Leader A A McKellar

of London, Edinburgh and Glasgow. In addition, one of two Special Reserve Squadrons would be formed. Under the provisions of the Air Force Reserve Act 1924, there would be six AAF Squadrons (600 series) and seven Special Reserve (SR) Squadrons (500 series) with the aim to reach the 20 Squadrons target. On 15th May 1925, 502 (Ulster) Squadron formed as the first SR Squadron at Aldergrove. On 15 September 1925, 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron formed as the first AAF Squadron. These were followed on the 14 October 1925 by 600 (City of London) and 601 (County of London) Squadrons at RAF Northolt and 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron at Turnhouse. All were light bomber Squadrons. Between 1926 and 1935



*The Marquess of
Clydesdale*



Flt Lt David McIntyre



*A close-range photograph of the
overflight of Everest*

both the AAF and SR expanded. In 1933 the Force had 1,335 Reserve personnel on strength. It was during this period, in 1933, when on 3rd April 1933, Squadron Leader, the Marquess of Clydesdale (Officer Commanding 602 Sqn) and Flt Lt D F McIntyre, were the first people to fly over Mount Everest at 30,000ft in two aircraft. Both Airmen were awarded Air Force Crosses.

The growing threat from the German re-armament programme was such that on 30 August 1936, to allow for rapid war expansion, the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) was formed with recruiting commencing in 1937. From 1936, as the situation in Europe deteriorated, including the 1938 Munich Crisis, an additional eight AAF Sqns were formed. Between 1938-39, 14 AAF Squadrons changed role from light bomber to fighter squadrons. As the countdown to war began, in August 1939, the AAF, RAFVR and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) were embodied into the Royal Air Force and when war was declared on 3rd September 1939, the Auxiliaries had a strength of 20 flying squadrons (with aircraft including Hurricane and Spitfires).

*501 Sqn Hurricane operating
in France in May 1940*



The Battle for France (Blitzkrieg), which began in earnest on 10th May 1940, lasting until beyond the final evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from the beaches of Dunkirk, involved no fewer than eleven Auxiliary Sqns, operating largely out of England of which, 501 (County of Gloucester) Squadron, operating on French soil, was engaged up until returning to England through a series of 'leap frogs' through France on 19th June 1940. During its period in combat, it flew 446 sorties, had 55 confirmed kills for the loss of seven Hurricanes and three pilots killed.

During the Battle of Britain, the AAF provided 14 of the 71 RAF, Commonwealth, Overseas fighter squad-



AAF Westland Wallaces of 501 (County of Gloucester) Sqn in formation during a training weekend

rons and Coastal Command squadrons that took an active part in the battle and it was calculated that the AAF squadrons accounted for approximately 30% of the 1,740 enemy aircraft destroyed during the battle, providing 15 AAF aces (pilots who shot down at least five enemy aircraft) including Squadron Leader Archie McKellar (605 Squadron with 22 confirmed “kills”) and Sergeant James ‘Ginger’ Lacey (501 Sqn), the highest scoring Royal Air Force non-commissioned pilot who flew during the battle, attaining 23 confirmed kills, including the Heinkel bomber that had bombed Buckingham Palace on 13th September 1940.

In a letter to the Honorary Inspector General of the RAuxAF on the presentation of the first Sovereign’s Colour in June 1989, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, remarked on the skill and valour of the RAuxAF during the Battle of Britain, mentioning ‘Ginger Lacey’ by name. At the end of the Battle of Britain, no fewer than four AAF squadrons were in the top 10 scoring squadrons; 501 (2nd with 99.5 kills), 607 and 609 (joint 3rd with 84 kills), and 602 (7th with 65 kills). The AAF order of battle of 188 aircrew also included 11 wireless operators/air gunners and one radar operator of whom 35 gave their lives.

In 1942, it was 501 Squadron from the AAF which provided the aircraft and pilots in the Battle of Britain combat scenes in the period film *First of the Few*, starring David Niven and Leslie Howard. The Squadron OC, Squadron Leader ‘Bunny’ Currant had an active role in the film, appearing as himself.

*Sergeant
James
“Ginger”
Lacey*



**Author: Wing Commander John Chappell MBE
MStJ AE VR RAuxAF – Vice President BoBHS**

BRENDAN EAMONN FERGUS FINUCANE DSO, DFC

41276 FO Pilot Irish 65 Squadron

Born on October 16 1920 in Dublin, Finucane was educated at the Christian Brother O'Connell School there. The family moved from Ireland to Richmond, Surrey in the mid 1930s. He was working in an office when he successfully applied for a short service commission in the RAF in 1938.

On August 29 1938 Finucane began an elementary flying training at 6 E&RFTS, Sywell as a pupil pilot. He moved to No 1 RAF Depot, Uxbridge on October 29, for a short disciplinary course, and then went to 8 FTS Montrose on November 12. After qualifying and being commissioned, he went to 13 MU, Henlow on June 26 1939, in the Practice and Test Flight.

He went to 7 OTU, Hawarden on June 28 1940 and after converting to Spitfires, he joined 65 Squadron at Hornchurch on July 15. He claimed a Bf 109 destroyed, another probably destroyed and one damaged on August 12 and a Bf 109 destroyed and probably another on the 13th.

In June 1941 he claimed a Bf110 on the 4th, on the 19th he shared a Ju 88, on February 4 destroyed a Bf109 and on April 15 another. He was awarded the DFC (13.5.41).

On April 14 Finucane was posted to 452 (RAAF) Squadron, then formed at Kirton-in-Lindsey, as a Flight Commander. He claimed a Bf 109 destroyed on July 11, the Squadron's first victory.

Between August 3 and October 13 1941 Finucane claimed sixteen Bf109s destroyed, two probably destroyed, two shared and two damaged. He was awarded a Bar to the DFC (9.9.41), a second bar (26.9.41) and the DSO (21.10.41). After breaking an ankle in the blackout, Finucane entered RAF Hospital Halton on November 14 and left a week later to convalesce at Torquay. He rejoined 452, at Kenley, on January 19 1942.

One week later Finucane took command of 602 Squadron at Redhill. He was wounded on February 20, in an engagement with FW 190s over the Channel. He destroyed a FW190 and shared another on March 13, shared a probable Bf109 and shared another on the



28th, damaged FW190s on April 2, 10 and 16, shared a FW190 on the 26th, damaged another on the 28th, probably destroyed one on the 30th, shot another FW 190 down on May 17 and probably another on June 8.

Finucane was appointed Wing Commander Flying at at Hornchurch on June 21 1942. After attacking ships at Ostend and strafing a German airfield on July 15, the Wing reformed to return to Hornchurch. As it passed at low level over the beach at Pointe du Touquet, Finucane's Spitfire, BM308, was hit by machine gun fire from the ground and his radiator was damaged. His engine began to overheat and Finucane apparently prepared to bale out but was too low. The engine stopped and he crashed into the sea, never to be seen again.

Finucane's last words over the R/T before hitting the water were 'This is it chaps'. He is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial, Panel 64. His portrait was done by Cuthbert Orde in October 1941.

APO 20.10.38 PO 29.8.39 FO 3.9.40 FL 3.9.41

Original Battle of Britain Paintings



P/O. B.E.F. Finucane, 65 Squadron (Size 16"x12", price £650 incl. UK p&p)

Unique oil paintings of Hurricanes and Spitfires in action during the Battle of Britain.

Originals for sale direct from the artist. Prices from £295 to £850 (incl. UK p&p).

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BoBHS MASCOT

Jane Collman is a dedicated member of the Battle of Britain Historical Society and has donated 'BoB' to us as our 'Mascot'.

'BoB' has been to Battle of Britain Airfields and Museums, even stayed overnight at those locations. Why not order a bear for yourself to remember a loved one?

All bears can be customised using clothing, precious/sentimental items and with embroidery added for that extra personal touch.

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The Royal Air Force

Croydon Airport

1918-1946



The Early days from 1st April 1918, until February 1920

The Royal Air Force was established on 1st April 1918 from the merging of the Royal Flying Corps and The Royal Naval Air Service. It was the world's first independent air force.

RAF Croydon was created on 1st April 1918, upon the founding of the Royal Air Force. It incorporated the former Royal Flying Corps' flying field at Beddington, to the west of Plough Lane, and a tented domestic site opposite, on the east side of Plough Lane. Survey work culminated in the building of Belfast truss hangars, workshops, stores, motor transport (MT) garages and other technical buildings proceeded apace. A guard room and Station HQ were also constructed on the east side of Plough Lane and the airfield itself was improved.

The domestic site was made more permanent with the building of barrack blocks, messes, an institute – known today as the NAAFI, gymnasium and other facilities. No 141 Squadron, from RAF Biggin Hill, used RAF Croydon as a landing ground in 1918, but the main role of RAF Croydon, as it had been in the Royal Flying Corps days, was Pilot Training. This was carried out by No 40 Training (ex Reserve) Squadron. This RFC Squadron arrived at Croydon in June 1917, became an RAF Squadron in April 1918 and stayed until December 1918. They used a variety of aircraft types, including Avro 504s, Sopwith Pups and Camels. No 29 Training (ex Reserve) Squadron arrived in December 1918, replacing No 40 Training Squadron. This Squadron trained Prince Albert, later His Majesty King George VI, to 'Wings' standard. It was equipped with Avro



504Js and Ks, de Havilland D.H.'s, Sopwith Camels and Snipes and other aircraft types. The station was also used by Squadrons returning from France upon disbandment. Other RAF units based at RAF Croydon were the Air Council Inspection Squadron from 1st July 1919. This Squadron later absorbed the Directorate of Research Flight. They moved to RAF Kenley on 1st February 1920, on being renamed No 24 Squadron. RAF Croydon also served as HQ No 1 Group, RAF, from 29th August 1919 until 8th January

1920, when it likewise moved to RAF Kenley. RAF Croydon also provided facilities for storage of surplus airframes and engines.

The first Royal Air Force Croydon officially closed February 1920, to make way for the civil Croydon Airport known as London's Terminal (Customs) Aerodrome, which transferred in from RAF Hounslow Heath.

Croydon Airport was initially used by British, French, Belgian and Dutch airliners flying on European routes. The original RAF Croydon domestic and technical buildings remained, supplemented by wooden huts used as airline offices, a Control Tower and other buildings as required. This Croydon Airport was demolished in 1928 to make way for an expanded, purpose built Airport and infrastructure, built east of the previous sites alongside a new road called Purley Way, formerly Coldharbour Lane.

The Second Royal Air Force Croydon, from 2nd September 1939.

Immediate prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the airlines were given very short notice to vacate Croydon. Their airliners were flown out to e.g. Bristol

(Whitechurch), Heston and Shoreham, on Friday September 1st 1939, to make way for the arrival of No 615 (County of Surrey), Auxiliary Air Force, Squadron's Gloster Gladiator fighters on the following morning. They were joined by the Hurricanes of Nos 3 and 17 Squadrons RAF later the same day. These Squadrons dispersed around the Aerodrome. No 3 Squadron flew its first operational sortie on 4th September, 1939. There followed many changes involving Squadrons moved out or being posted in. Amongst the latter were Nos 145 and 92 Squadrons, RAF, equipped with twin-engine Blenheim 1fs. In March 1940 92 Squadron received its first Spitfires to be based at RAF Croydon. In June 1940, No 1 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force (later No 401 Squadron, RCAF) arrived at RAF Croydon. They were equipped with Canadian-built Hurricanes, which had to be quickly modified to meet operational standards.

'Black Thursday', August 15th 1940 and the 'Battle of Britain'

RAF Croydon received its first 'all-out' attack from the Luftwaffe, without warning, on the evening of 15th August 1940, a day which became known locally as 'Black Thursday'. The raid was by the specialised intruder unit Erprobungsgruppe 210 using Messerschmitt 110s, led by Swiss-born Hauptmann W Rubensdorfer. Much damage and loss of life was caused, especially amongst civilians who were changing shifts in nearby factories. The Hurricanes of No 111 Squadron, which had scrambled half an hour earlier, attacked the raiders, with some success. The Germans suffered heavy losses. Amongst those killed was Rubensdorfer and his crewmen. There were many other raids on RAF Croydon during the 'Battle of Britain' period. A number of RAF Squadrons, heavily involved in the Battle of Britain, used Croydon when their regular bases at RAF Kenley and Biggin Hill were put out of action. Much diminished 'war weary' Squadrons, such as No 111 were transferred away and fresh Squadrons were posted in, as required.

Miscellaneous Activities 1941-1944

After a quiet period, another Canadian Squadron formed at Croydon on August 13th 1941. This was No 414 Squadron RCAF, which flew Westland Lysanders and Curtiss Tomahawks on Army co-operation tasks.

They stayed for one year. In the Summer of 1942, two Polish RAF Squadrons No 302 and 317, with Spitfire VBs, flew offensive missions from Croydon for a short while before moving on. A number of miscellaneous units, such as No 116 Squadron on radar calibration work and No 1 Aircraft delivery Flight operated at Croydon in 1943/44. No 287 Squadron, with Defiants, Hudsons and other aircraft, operated many detached flights for target towing and gun laving duties from 1941.

No 110 Wing, RAF Transport Command and the Closure of RAF Croydon 1944-1946

No 147 Squadron arrived at Croydon on September 5 1944 with Dakota aircraft, and became part of RAF Transport Command's No 110 Wing, which had set up earlier. This wing opened an expanding number of passenger and freight services into occupied Europe. Cities regularly served included Paris, Brussels, Marseilles, Naples, Athens, Prague, Warsaw and Copenhagen. RAF Croydon became extremely busy, moving military, including returned wounded and former prisoners of war and authorised civilian passengers to or from these locations. A tentative return of some internal UK civil flying commenced in November 1944. No 110 Wing's workload, however, was such that from October 1945, No 435 Squadron, RCAF from RAF Down Ampney was attached and stayed until March 1946. They were replaced by No 437 Squadron RCAF, from RAF Blakehill Farm, who returned to Canada with their aircraft, at the end of May 1946. Both these Canadian Squadrons operated Dakotas. During February 1946, some services were transferred from No 110 Wing to the British Overseas Airways Corporation, European Division, shortly to become the British European Airways Corporation. This trend continued, No 11 Wing then disbanded, but No 147 Squadron carried on until September 1946. RAF Croydon had then ceased to be and became a civil airport once again.



Article provided by Anthony Francis, Area Manager, Kent



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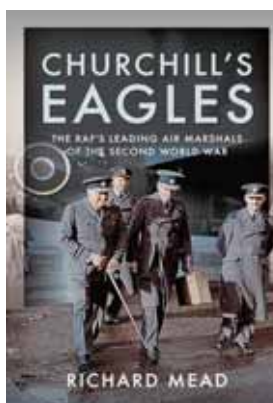
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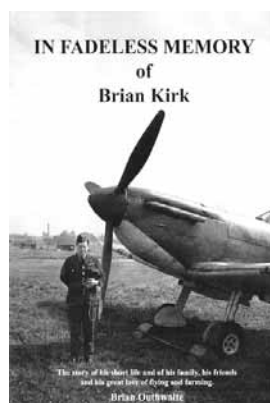


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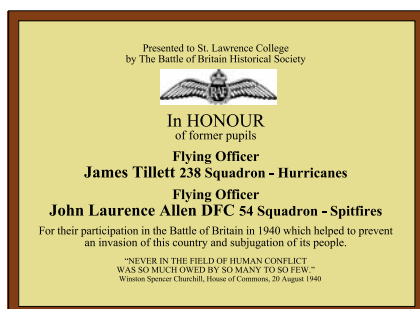
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St Lawrence College

Plaque Presentation – Ramsgate, Kent. 20th September 2024

A further plaque unveiling ceremony in the memory of two Battle of Britain pilots: Flying Officer James Tillet and Flying Officer John Laurence Allen DFC took place on Friday 20th September 2024 at St Lawrence College, Ramsgate, Kent. The plaque was unveiled by His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Kent, Lady Colgrain.



A fine sunny day was enjoyed by all. The presentation started with a parade on the College green by the RAF, army and air cadets, the Royal British Legion and others. They were inspected by the Lord Lieutenant before all proceeded to the College chapel where the service took place. The main party then moved to the memorial wall just outside the chapel where the plaque was unveiled. Unfortunately no relatives of the two airmen could be found. A light buffet took place to end a very moving event when the Lord Lieutenant joined invited guests in the dining hall to enjoy a very generous spread provided by the college.

Article: Anthony Francis – Area Manager, Kent



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'Last of the Few' pilot celebrates his 105th birthday at UK Embassy

The last known Battle of Britain airman, Group Captain John 'Paddy' Hemingway DFC celebrated his 105th birthday at the British Embassy, Dublin Ireland. The event was marked with the unveiling by Ms Elin Burns (Deputy UK Ambassador to Ireland), of portraits reflecting different stages in Gp Capt Hemingway's life, which were painted by British artist Dan Llywelyn Hall.



Representatives from the Royal Air Force and Paddy's family were hosted at the British Embassy.

Group Captain Hemingway DFC said, "I am here because I had the

staggering luck to fight alongside great pilots flying magnificent aircraft with the best ground crew in the best air force in the world. It has been a pleasure to ask Dan to capture some moments of my life in his portraits. I hope to see you all again. Next year"

Ms Elin Burns said, "It is an honour and a privilege to celebrate Group Captain Hemmingway's 105th Birthday here at the Embassy. Paddy is an inspiration and a true hero. Getting the chance to meet him and his family has been such a fantastic experience. We thank him for his many years of service and wish him many happy returns on such a special day."

Air Marshal Sean Reynolds, RAF Air Officer for Northern Ireland said, "It's wonderful that we can celebrate Group Captain Hemingway's 105th Birthday in



this way. Paddy is an extraordinary person and a true example of the RAF ethos of Service. The whole RAF wishes him a very Happy Birthday."

Mr Dan Llywelyn Hall, Artist said, "In creating a series of portraits, I have emphasised different character facets of John's rich personality. He is above all, a proud Irishman and occupies an utterly unique moment in our history – a shared history between Britain and Ireland – finding himself the final voice and embodiment of a defining period."

The portraits will be auctioned at a later date, with some of the proceeds donated to his Nursing Home in Dublin, where Paddy resides.

Pilot Officer John "Paddy" Hemingway, born in Dublin in 1919, joined the RAF in 1938. He was one of the young pilots of 85 Squadron that took off from Lille-Seclin aerodrome on strafing attacks, air patrols and dogfights in what became known as the "Battle of France". No 85 squadron had been in France since the start of the "phony war" in September 1939.

On 10th May 1940, Paddy was recorded as destroying a He-111, the following day he downed a Do-17 but his Hurricane fighter plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, and he had to make a forced landing.

Returning to the UK, 85



F/O John Allman Hemingway DFC

40702 FO Pilot Irish 85 Squadron



Squadron, under a new commanding officer, Peter Townsend, became one of the front-line squadrons of 11 Group (Fighter Command) responded to the daily attacks from German aircraft, which became to be known as the 'Battle of Britain'. Paddy's logbook records, almost nonchalantly, the five daily sorties he and the other pilots sometimes had to undertake in defence of the United Kingdom. In August 1940, during hectic dogfights, Paddy was twice forced to bail out of his Hurricanes, landing once in the sea off the Essex coast and in marshland on the other occasion.

On 1 July 1941, Paddy was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and in September that year, he was Mentioned in Dispatches.

Paddy went on to serve as an Air Fighter Controller for Operation Overlord – the Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944. In 1945, he served in the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces with 324 Wing and

eventually commanded 43 Squadron, which served in Italy. It was during this time that he was forced to bail out a fourth time. While attacking enemy forces near Ravenna in April 1945, his Spitfire was hit multiple times by anti-aircraft fire. He parachuted into enemy territory and with the help of Italian locals, managed to contact Italian partisans, who helped him return to his squadron.

After the war, Paddy was posted to the Middle East and Greece. Paddy went on to work with NATO in HQ SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe). In 1966 he became Officer Commanding RAF Leconfield. He retired from the Royal Air Force on 12th September 1969 as a Group Captain.



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