



# Celebrating 100 years of the RAF

# LOYALTY

The 33 Squadron RAF Association Newsletter

Issue 8 Summer 2018

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WISHING THE RAF A HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY!

1 April 1918: 33 (Home Defence) Squadron becomes  
33 Squadron Royal Air Force —more inside!

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## *Inside this issue...*

- Page 3.** From the Chairman/Editor.
- Page 4.** All good things ..... Farewell to Wing Commander Andy Baron.
- Page 6.** Welcome to Wing Commander Chris Royston-Airey, the new OC 33 .
- Page 7.** Major Philip Joubert de la Ferté RFC - 33's first CO.
- Page 10.** From the National Archives at Kew: No.33 Home Defence Squadron 1918.
- Page 13.** Gainsborough's War Story-Book 4: 33 Squadron RFC arrives.
- Page 18.** 1 April 1918 - Flight Magazine marks an epoch, then tracks the arguments!
- Page 21.** Chapter 8. The Desert & The Balkans: No. 33 Squadron. An extract from 'Ten Squadrons of Hurricanes' by Adrian Stewart.
- Page 31.** RAF Henley on Thames - Extracts from 'Spitfires & Autogiros: A History of Upper Culham Farm' by Darren J Pitcher.
- Page 35.** Javelins of St George. Profile of an All-Weather Fighter Squadron.
- Page 37.** Exercise VIXEN EAGLE by Sergeant Russ Vickers, A Flt 33 Sqn.



Gloster Javelin F.A.W.7 XH903 'G' clearly displaying No.33 Squadron colours and Hart's Head badge on the tail fin. The photograph appeared in the Tangmere Museum's Aircraft of the Month article about the Gloster Javelin in September 2007. Unfortunately there were no details about the location, or the history of the aircraft, attached. Over to you!



## From the Chairman / Editor..

Most 33 Squadron veterans know that No. 33 (H.D.) Squadron RFC formed at Filton aerodrome near Bristol on 12 January 1916, and moved to the North of England a few months later to defend Sheffield, Leeds and Hull, equipped with aircraft unable to reach the operating altitudes of the German Zeppelins. Another special date from that period date for all serving and ex-serving members of the RAF is 1 April 1918, as it marks the creation of our Service 100 years ago, just a few years after man had first experienced powered flight. The RAF has been in continuous service ever since its formation, and 33 Squadron has been part of that proud record for almost as long.

33 Squadron has flown 14 different fixed wing aircraft types since 1916, even operating as a SAM squadron before its most 'recent' type change back in 1971. In 2021 33 will have been operating the Puma as part of the Support Helicopter Force for nearly 50 years, surely cause for a large celebration, yet merely one more role to add to the training, fighter, night fighter, air defence, bomber, bomber escort, Close Air Support and Air Interdiction roles undertaken by our predecessors. The outgoing boss, Andy Baron, handed over command to Chris Royston-Airey in March and Andy's article provides an excellent summary of the Squadron's achievements over the last three years. The Association extends a warm welcome to Wing Commander Royston-Airey and wishes him every success.

The RAF100 editions of LOYALTY will contain several articles that reflect the transition from the Royal Flying Corps to the Royal Air Force, consider aspirations and expectations and discover the precarious position that the RAF found itself in during its early years. As this edition contains the last part from the Archives at Kew, I thought that I would research the man who had been tasked with creating the squadron and became its first Commanding Officer - Major Philip Bennet Joubert de la Ferté. I was pleased to finally get my hands on his autobiography. As a young RFC lieutenant, de la Ferté had flown one of the first two operational sorties of World War One, and went on to achieve Air Chief Marshal rank by the end of World War Two, so his book was bound to be full of great stories, anecdotes and information covering the formation of our Squadron. All is revealed on pages 10-12.

Historically, LOYALTY has always been published as the commemoration services in Crete begin and this year is no exception.

As we go to print I am pleased to say that the Association will be represented in Crete this year by one of its stalwart members - Graham Lowe - who is accompanied by his wife. I am looking forward to his recollections at the AGM in June, and being able to publish his version of the events over there.

We are just a couple of weeks away from this year's AGM, which is taking place at the Tangmere Military Aviation Museum (TMAM) down on the south coast near Chichester. Tangmere is an airfield that 33 had been based at during World War Two and this location was agreed by the Committee as a small sign of acknowledgement to Brian Randall, one of our keenest members who sadly passed away at the beginning of this year. Brian was a man who could always be relied on to attend the Cenotaph Parade and Association events and I know his name would have been one of the first on the list as we try to have thirty three Association members marching down the Mall this year. One of Brian's closest friends, Trevor Clark, is the TMAM Archivist and Deputy Curator and I would like to thank him here for the warm welcome and assistance that he has given to the Committee since we met at Brian's funeral. Intriguingly, Trevor has trawled through the archives and sent this comment in a recent email: "I've been trawling through our archives today and can now promise your members some rather special 33 Sqn. memorabilia that I think is probably unique and dates back a very long time!" I still have no idea what Trevor has discovered, and if you are not planning to attend the AGM then you will have to wait until the Autumn edition in November to find out exactly what Trevor is referring to.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that RAF Benson will be holding another Families Day this year, which will take place on Thursday 26 July, and our efforts to re-establish what many may recall as a 'Crete Day'- style gathering have taken another step closer to fulfilment. The new OC 33 has already agreed to let the Association members use the aircrew crew room as a meeting point. As soon as we know the procedure for ordering tickets, and work out a suitable POC, we will contact you. Do put the date in your diary, I hope you can make it. Now, any volunteers out there to bake cakes, cut sandwiches and make the tea?

*Proud to be 33....  
Dave Stewart*

### 33 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE



#### PRESIDENT

Air Commodore Paul Lyall

#### CHAIRMAN

Dave Stewart  
davestewart33@icloud.com

#### DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Dick Brewster  
davestewart33@icloud.com

#### TREASURER

Jez Read  
jezr69@gmail.com

#### SECRETARY

Squadron Leader Neil Scott (to be ratified at the 2018 AGM)

#### LOYALTY EDITOR

Dave Stewart  
davestewart33@icloud.com

#### MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Chief Technician Paul Davies  
33sqnassociation@gmail.com

#### SQUADRON AIRCREW REP

Flight Lieutenant Genevieve Rolleston-Smith

#### SQUADRON GROUNDCREW REP

WO Sean Docherty (WO Eng 33 Sqn)

# *All good things...Farewell to Wing Commander Andy Baron*

It is true that all good things must come to an end, but it does not make it any easier to hand over command of the RAF's finest Squadron to someone else. But that is exactly what I have just done. After what has been for me the best 26 months of my RAF career, I handed the stewardship of 33 Squadron to Wing Commander Chris Royston-Airey in mid-March.

As I sit in my study (box bedroom filled with stuff), I can reflect on just what we, as a Squadron, have achieved in the last 26 months; it has been a lot and we all should be rightly proud. I will highlight a few of our achievements in more detail later, but up front, whether as solely 33 Squadron or as a joint effort with 230 Squadron, in the last 26 months we have: been on constant operations in Kabul, held an unbroken National Standby duty at extremely high readiness, been deployed for a total of almost 10 months to El Centro in the USA, deployed on the first ever contingency operation for the Puma Mk 2 to the Caribbean, supported numerous Defence exercises in the UK and Europe, deployed on three overseas Sqn Force Development exercises to look at our Squadron's history, been presented with a Battle Honour for Iraq, had numerous Squadron personnel officially recognised with commendations for their hard work and dedication, we have created and fostered links with Scotland and Northern Ireland and generated opportunities for cadets to see and fly in helicopters in an attempt to generate the next generation, and quietly, in the background, the training flight on 33 Squadron has begun to grow the capability of the Puma Mk2. We have done much more besides, but these are the headlines.

I took command after the Centenary Parade in 2012 and deployed almost immediately to visit the 33 Squadron 'A' Flight aircrew and engineers on Operation TORAL. This deployment right at the start of my tour was to be the sign of things to come and it was fantastic to get back to Kabul, a place I first visited in 2005 whilst on operations. Looking back, it was also the place where I had my stag night in 2005! But that is all I will say about that!

33 Squadron personnel and the entire Puma Force have now been on operations in Kabul since March 2015 and all continue to do a fantastic job keeping people safe and off the roads. Whilst it is impossible to quantify, I have no doubt whatsoever that our mission there is saving lives, and at the end of the day, it is core Support Helicopter business and the Puma is the perfect platform for it.

The highlight of my tour must, of course, be Operation RUMAN; disaster relief operations in the Caribbean. Many of us have joked for years about getting deployed on operations to the Caribbean, and for 33 Squadron it came true in 2017. Joking aside, however, Operation RUMAN was an essential humanitarian relief operation in which the Puma Force (aircrew from 33 Squadron and engineers from 33 and 230 Squadrons) played a significant part, and proved beyond any doubt the capabilities and unique attributes of the relatively new Puma Mk2 helicopter.

This was probably the most surreal detachment so far in my 20 years in the military; we went from sleeping under the stars, getting flooded out and ants crawling over the engineers, to living in a derelict building with no amenities, stinking of bat \*\*\*\* and hot as hell, to evacuating our hangar which was then destroyed by a second Category 5 hurricane, to sleeping one night in three in a small hotel room crammed with 7 people, to towards the end, some spending six nights on a cruise ship hired by the Americans, complete with Bingo and 'Jonny Chicago' on Karaoke! I think the engineers hold the record for the greatest number of different places slept in during any deployment, as they averaged moving something along the lines of every three days. Ultimately this operation was extremely successful and we helped a lot of people get back on their feet, which is what it was all about.

Finally, I want to mention the 33 Squadron Association and the superb support it gave me as the Boss. It was one of my hopes, during my time in charge, that the Squadron and its Association could come closer together. With the help of the Chairman, I believe we have gone some way to doing this and I have no doubt that the new OC will continue in this vein. The highlight of this must, of course, be the combined Squadron/Association push to France, Belgium and the Netherlands in 2017 for a joint battlefield visit, focusing on 33 Squadron's participation during the Battle of the Scheldt. It has been a great pleasure to host the Association on a few occasions and whilst it still proves difficult to get the younger members of the Squadron to see the benefits of joining, I know a few of the older members have. I sincerely hope that the relationship between 33 and the Association continues to grow.

*LOYALTY Andy Baron*





**Above: Wing Commander Andy Baron hands over command of No. 33 Squadron, along with the Squadron crest from his flying suit, to Wing Commander Chris Royston-Airey . Start of a new tradition?**

**Below: Andy Baron—Face#33 of RAF Benson’s 100 Faces.**



## Welcome to Wg Cdr Chris Royston-Airey, the new OC 33

I was afforded the absolute privilege of taking command of 33 Squadron on the 1st of April of this year. For me, the fact that this date coincided with the 100th Anniversary of the RAF made that privilege all the more special.

In the short time that I have been in the chair, I have been hugely impressed both by the people of 33 Squadron; engineers, aircrew and support staff alike, and by the Puma II aircraft that we are all fortunate enough to operate.

Having previously served on 28 and 78 Squadrons when they were operating the Merlin Mk 3s/3as at RAF Benson, I am acutely aware of the enduring 'work hard – play hard' approach that 33 Squadron is renowned for, along with its quiet understated professionalism, and for the strong Squadron spirit and camaraderie that epitomises our Squadron motto, 'Loyalty'.



Despite being yet to complete the OCU (aircraft serviceability remains a perennial problem....), I have just returned from a month on Exercise IMPERIAL ZEPHYR in Southern California, where crews from both 33 and 230 Squadrons have been honing their skillsets, and conducting Environmental Training in preparation for upcoming deployments to Afghanistan, or whatever other hot and dusty far off lands we find ourselves in next! Notwithstanding the harsh climatic conditions and relentless pace, the aircraft performed superbly, and even the most junior of aircrew relished the opportunity to push themselves and their operating to the next level. As with all 'high end' SH Environmental Training, the professionalism and dedication of the instructional staff was key to success, their performance in this instance was nothing short of exceptional.

Beyond these first impressions, it would be remiss of me not to mention the excellent work that Dave Stewart continues to lead on with the Association. I was warned by my predecessor of Dave's boundless enthusiasm for both the Squadron Association, and for 'all things 33', he has not disappointed! I know that he is but one of a pool of dedicated individuals, who give up their time to support the Association, and produce this excellent publication. I urge you to continue to support him both through the production of 'Loyalty', and through spreading the word to past and present members of 33 Squadron.

On a final note, I will reiterate my opening line, it is an absolute honour to have been given the opportunity to command what I genuinely believe to be the finest Squadron in the RAF for the next two and a half years. As with all commands, there will undoubtedly be challenges, frustrations and, at times, disappointments. But needless to say, my primary driver is the moral and ethical obligation of all military commanders - to enhance and refine the Unit that they lead, and leave it in a better place than when they found it.

Yours

Chris Royston-Airey

Wing Commander

OC 33 Squadron

'Loyalty'



## Major Philip Joubert de la Ferté RFC- 33's first CO



The article below is based on extracts from 'The Fated Sky' by ACM Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté. Sir Philip's autobiography was first published in August 1952 and described by a number of eminent papers of the time as a '*...highly readable as well as an illuminating book*' (Daily Graphic), '*...an extremely interesting account of the triumphs and trials of the British armed forces, especially the RAF*' (Daily Telegraph) and '*...his book could hardly be bettered.*' (Daily Dispatch). Stretching to 280 pages, 'The Aeroplane's critic said of the book that '*...there is not half enough of it ...of all the war books I recommend it as about the most entertaining and informative as background to the great events with which the bigger and heavier books deal ponderously ...Sir Philip's account of how he transferred to the RFC and how he learned to fly and of the people he knew and of the things he did, will give old-timers agonies of nostalgia interspersed with paroxysms of glee*'.

Having dealt with his childhood in India in the opening chapter, where his father was a doctor with the Indian Medical Service in Calcutta, he goes on to describe his unhappiness at being shipped to boarding school in England aged nine, his education being interspersed with far happier holidays with an aunt and uncle in the south of France. His father wanted Philip to go into the Army, preferably the Royal Engineers, which his father considered to be the only branch where Philip could support himself. He went on to pass the entrance examination for Harrow, and specialized in the Army Class to study for a Service career. It was at Harrow that Philip's lack of mathematical prowess became evident, and he failed his first attempt to enter the Royal Military Academy Woolwich, commonly known as "The Shop" because its first building was a converted workshop of the Woolwich Arsenal. A six week crammer enabled him to eventually pass the Woolwich entrance exam, and he began his two year course to become a commissioned officer with the Royal Engineers or Royal Artillery. Woolwich was not the happiest time of his life, and he wrote that although they were well fed, well housed and reasonably well taught, he looked back on two years of hard work and severe discipline, broken only by occasional periods of fun.

Philip's lack of mathematical ability saw him achieve a record at Woolwich, which at the time of his book being published had still to be broken, when he failed three times to make the scoring minimum in higher mathematics. That meant that he had no hope of gaining an Engineer commission. Instead, he wrote that he '*...scrambled out with a commission in the Field Gunners*' when he graduated in 1907.

In Chapter Four he informs the reader that his fate was settled in the early summer of 1912 while watching the Aeroplane Squadron of the Balloon Battalion of the Royal Engineers flying on Farnborough Common. He had recognized one of the pilots from his time at Woolwich and asked about volunteering for the Royal Flying Corps that had been formed that April. Having been told that an application to join would be welcomed, Philip approached his father to lend him the money to learn to fly and take the Royal Aero Club's certificate. He passed out on a Bristol biplane with a total of 1 hour 50 minutes flying and then waited for a slot at the Central Flying School to acquire his military certificate. In early Spring 1913 he passed the military aviation test, by flying from Farnborough to Guildford and back, a distance of sixteen miles, and on 7 March 1913 he became a Flying Officer in the RFC. In April 1913 he was posted to No.2 Squadron in Montrose, Scotland, then moved at four hours' notice to No.3 Squadron at Netheravon in June 1913 to fly the single seater Blériot monoplane, initially with 50h.p. and later 80 h.p. engines.

Philip was present at the 1914 midsummer 'concentration' camp at Netheravon when the four RFC squadrons –Nos 2, 3, 4, and 5 – were assembled in order to prove the accuracy of the Minister of War's statement to the House of Commons that the RFC had 101 serviceable aircraft. It was at this Camp that the RFC was told of the approaching war with Germany. No. 3 Squadron deployed to France from Netheravon on 12 August 1914, with Philip as one of the flight commanders. The squadron flew via Dover where the pilots were issued "*...with a motor-car tyre inner tube which we were instructed to blow up and wear round our middles in case we fell into the "drink" on our way to France.*"

The prime task facing the first RFC squadrons in France in August 1914 was reconnaissance in direct tactical support of the BEF, and sceptical Army commanders were quick to appreciate their reports as the Germany Army swept through Belgium towards France. Philip flew the very first RFC war reconnaissance sortie on 19 August in a Bleriot monoplane, accompanied by Lieutenant G W Mapplebeck of 4 Squadron in a BE2a. Lifting from Maubeuge to recce Waterloo, he got lost, landed at Tournai, refuelled, got lost again and landed at Courtrai, where he was threatened with arrest as the War Office had not issued anyone with identity papers. Recognised by a Belfast linen dealer in the crowd as a true Englishman by his bad language, he was refuelled again, given directions to Waterloo and eventually got back to base where he was told he had been given up as dead.

In October 1914 Philip was ordered back to England to form a new Squadron – No. 15 Squadron - and while he was at Farnborough he met Colonel Trenchard for the first time. Philip wrote: *“The first contact with Trenchard is an experience no one is likely to forget. In the following weeks I got to know this great man fairly well and learned to respect his integrity, his drive, and his extraordinary power of coming to a correct conclusion by a complicated and sometimes even erroneous series of arguments.”* Philip goes on to write about the happy and interesting time that followed while forming his new Squadron, having the pick of the recruits from the depot on the other side of the aerodrome, from which he was able to select men of good character and excellent technical qualifications. As we will read later, what a difference to the situation he will find himself in at Filton in 1916. Records show that No. 15 Squadron was first formed at Farnborough on 1 March 1915 as an RFC training unit, mainly equipped with Royal Aircraft Factory B.E.2cs, supplemented with a few Bristol Scouts. The Squadron moved to France on 22 December 1915 to undertake a reconnaissance role in support of the Army. However, in August 1915 Philip had been posted again, this time to take over command of No.1 Squadron in France from Major Geoffrey Salmond, a squadron that he describes as the pioneer in the art of Army cooperation. He commanded No.1 Squadron from 19 August to 24 November 1915.

Chapter Six is the chapter that I was looking forward to most, the chapter in which Philip Joubert de la Ferté would reveal, in similar detail to his previous experiences, the joy of setting up No.33 Squadron. That particular period of his career is covered in the first three pages, which I reproduce in their entirety below:

*“Northern France has a peculiar unpleasant climate, and as autumn turned to winter in 1915 there was a good deal of sickness amongst the troops. Trench feet*

*and frostbite were fairly common and even the comfortable billets of the RFC were insufficient protection against the cold and damp of the Flanders Plain.*

*I was one of the sufferers, and after struggling against illness for some days I was finally bundled off to the Duchess of Westminster Hospital at Le Touquet. This hospital had been established in the Casino and was, on the whole, well managed, though I must confess to doing my best to escape from it as soon as possible. It was not much fun when running a temperature to be called at 6.30 am on a December morning and made to wash in an open wash-place in the courtyard. In the ward there would be a very seriously wounded case at one end, while at the other semi-convalescents played a gramophone. Fortunately one of the doctors was an old Harrovian who had been in the same House as myself, and within days I was in a hospital ship bound for England. Although I did not realize it at the time, the fact that I had fallen sick caused me to have a serious fall from grace in the eyes of General Trenchard. ‘Boom’ Trenchard was - officially - never ill and he had little use for people who ‘went sick’. It was some years before I regained favour in his eyes.*

*After a week or two at home I was able to persuade a medical board (they did not need much persuasion then) that I was fit for light duty. The light duty that came my way was the formation of a new Squadron at Filton Aerodrome, near Bristol. From the outgoing Squadron, on its way to France and early destruction, I took over some aircraft without engines, crates of engines that did not fit the aircraft, one Corporal and sixty men whose trade qualifications varied from ‘indifferent’ to ‘bad’. There was also one Flight Commander and a dozen pupils. Fortunately I knew a number of good men recovering from illness but still in hospital. These were slipped past the unwatchful eyes of the doctors and helped me to mould our uncompromising material into something resembling a Squadron, But it was hard and thankless work. The weather did not help. About Christmas a blizzard blew up which did a great deal of damage and stopped flying for several days. The cold worried our convalescent team very much, and as far as I was concerned, if I had not found a good line in vintage port in my hotel I might have gone back to hospital again.*

*At this time the Zeppelins had been causing alarm and despondency in the country and my Squadron, No. 33, was destined to take part in the defence against their attacks. The Chief Constable of Bristol was very anxious about the possibilities of air raids on the city and had done a great deal to improve the ‘black-out’. I was asked to fly over the city and report upon the amount of light that was still showing. This was my first experience of serious night flying and I spent a long time cruising*



over the docks and centre of the town, pinpointing places which showed too much light. When I got back to the aerodrome a lamp was flashing the following signal: "For God's sake come down. We want our dinner!"

By the spring of 1916 the Squadron had at last taken shape and we were moved to our operational station at Tadcaster, from which we were to defend the industrial Midland and Leeds in particular. Our aircraft were not well suited to the job. There was no proper night flying equipment, no W/T or R/T, and our only means of navigation was to watch the anti-aircraft searchlights and pinpoint ourselves upon them. The weapons with which we were to attack the Zeppelins were 20 lb. Hales bombs carried in racks under the fuselage and which we were supposed to drop by eye from above at short range, thus destroying the enemy and probably ourselves as well.

The aerodrome at Tadcaster was in pleasant surroundings, the men lived in a disused jam factory, a substantial and weatherproof building that made an excellent barracks and which had the additional convenience of being within 100 yards of their work. The officers were quartered in the 'Priest's House' of a neighbouring estate, a most welcome change from the leaky and draughty huts at Bristol. Morale improved appreciably with the prospects of active operations and the winter discontents were soon forgotten.

There was only one fly in the ointment. As a 'safety' measure we had been told to establish a chain of emergency landing grounds round Leeds and Bradford. It was not easy to find suitable fields and, in any case, most of the neighbourhood was blacked out at night by smoke from the factory areas. At each landing ground were a dozen aged reservists whose job it was to light the landing flares on demand. These small detachments were a nuisance to maintain and discipline, while their housing presented a never-ending problem. They were unpopular with the local inhabitants, and one old lady upon whom I billeted some of them exclaimed, "What! Soldiers in the house! We have come down in the world!"

Flying round at night one prayed fervently that engine trouble would not compel a landing away from the main aerodrome. The Hales bomb was a very touchy article, and to land at night with four of them 'alive' under one's seat most definitely produced 'that sinking feeling'. Mercifully we were soon to issue with a new type of incendiary ammunition for use in machine guns which gave some chance of destroying the enemy without immolating oneself. But in my old fashioned B.E. I spent some hours chasing phantom Zeppelins round Yorkshire and my dreams of a large bag remained unfulfilled. Before our equipment reached a state of efficiency I suffered another change of scene.

Middle East Command was expanding and a new Brigade Headquarters formed in Cairo. The CO of the 5th Wing on the Canal, Geoffrey Salmond, whom I had followed in command of No.1 Squadron in 1915, was promoted to Brigadier-General and I was for the second time sent abroad to take his place."

And that was all that our first CO wrote about 33 Squadron, it is not referred to anywhere in his book again. Major Joubert de la Ferté was posted away from the squadron to take command of No.14 Squadron in Egypt on the 2nd June, 33 Squadron was temporarily taken over by Captain J.A. Cunningham who had joined as a Flight Commander on the 31st May. Cunningham was quickly succeeded by Captain W.C.K. Birch who was posted to the squadron as Acting Squadron Commander on the 13th June. During his six months in command, Joubert de la Ferté had seen 33 utilised during the day for the advanced training of personnel for overseas, in addition to Home Defence duties, on the understanding that 50% of the Home Defence aeroplanes could be used for this purpose provided that at least half the defence machines were always in a fit condition for night flying. That scheme did not prove successful, mainly due to the fact that aeroplanes which had been used for training during the day although serviceable at night could not be maintained at that standard of efficiency which was so essential to night flying. As a result, on 24th June, Home Defence Squadrons were separated from training squadrons and a new Defence Wing, at first known as the 16th Wing and later as the Home Defence Wing, was formed. Home Defence Squadrons were temporarily reduced from eight to six, owing to urgent demands from overseas and the fact that a 'close' season for airship raids might be expected during the short summer nights. This Wing, although formed with effect from the 25th June, did not actually come into being until the 7th July; between that date and the 14th July No. 33 (H.D.) Squadron, together with Nos. 36, 38, 39, 50 and 51 (H.D.) Squadrons, was transferred to the new Wing, with No. 33 (H.D.) Squadron handing over its training aeroplanes to No. 57 Squadron, having supplied the nucleus for its formation in May.

# From the National Archives at Kew:

## No. 33 Home Defence Squadron 1918

**In the previous Newsletter there was an article that covered the formation of the Squadron, its operations and losses up to the end of 1917. Once again the following paragraphs are a transcription of a document in the National Archives in Kew, detailing the history of 33 (HD) Squadron RFC, soon to become 33 Squadron RAF:**

The next raid on the Hull district occurred on the night of the 12th March 1918, when three airships crossed the coast between Flamborough Head and just south of Hornsea between 9.25 p.m. and 10.05 p.m. Although bombs dropped on Hull and villages of Sutton, Swine, Seaton Ross and Melbourne, they mostly fell in open spaces and the only casualty was one woman who died from shock in Hull.

Attempts were made to despatch aeroplanes from Kirton-in-Lindsey and Scampton, but in each case the pilot was forced to descend after few minutes' flight on account of thick mist and drizzle.

On the 12th April, five airships crossed the coast between Withernsea and Cromer at varying times from 9.30 p.m. to 10 p.m. One which entered at the Spurn reached Wigan, and another which came in at Cromer found Birmingham. Each dropped about two and a half tons of bombs. Of the other three, one flew about the Humber and dropped her bombs harmlessly on the south side of the river. Another raided Lincoln with little result; while the fifth flew about the Wash and dropped bombs which fell for the most part where they could do no harm.

Aeroplanes were unable to ascend from Kirton-in-Lindsey on account of thick fog; one which rose from Elsham at 9.10p.m. was forced down by thick mist and low clouds twenty minutes later. Scampton was able to despatch two; one, piloted by Lieutenant J. Heyes, observer Second Lieutenant E.H. Canning left the ground at 9.10 p.m. at 1,000 feet the pilot was unable to see the landing flares. He climbed to 5,000 feet but could go no higher as the weather was becoming worse. After patrolling from Scampton to Kirton-in-Lindsey approximately , until 11.16 p.m. without sighting the enemy, the pilot was compelled to descend through engine trouble. On coming down he could not locate any landing flares and decided to undertake a forced landing which he carried out successfully. The second aeroplane, piloted by Lieutenant L. Murphy, observer No.87832 AM W. Taylor, left Scampton at 10 p.m. and climbed over the aerodrome through mist and

clouds to 4,000 feet and then heading towards Hedon climbed to 8,000 feet when, the pilot states "I saw an object in a break in the clouds against the stars which I took to be a Zeppelin. I judged it to be about 12,000 feet or 15,000 feet from the ground, and about 2½ to 3 miles east of my position. I turned towards it and climbed hard but could only reach 9,200 feet, owing to getting into thick clouds. At this height I was constantly running into banks of cloud or mist. I lost my object for about 4 minutes but picked it up again and found that it had gained distance from me. I held him in sight for about two minutes, during which time I was steering S.W. I did not open fire owing to long distance, hoping to get a more favourable opportunity, but suddenly my object disappeared and I was unable to pick it up again". Lieutenant Murphy descended at Scampton at 12.25 after spending nearly two hours and a half in the air.

The General Officer Commanding the VI Brigade in his report on this raid stated that in his view of the weather he considered the performance of these two pilots to be exceptionally good.

The Northern Defence Area\* was formed on the 21st May 1918 and comprised the four squadrons north of the Wash i.e. No.33 Squadron, Gainsborough, No.36 Squadron, Newcastle-on-Tyne, No.77 Squadron, Turnhouse, and No. 76 Squadron, Ripon. The authority for the issue of operation orders was now vested in the G.O.C. of this area in place of the Garrison Commanders. This Defence Area also took in No.38 Squadron. Melton Mowbray which had previously been directly under the orders of the VI Brigade.

With effect from the 1st June the VI Brigade was re-organised into two groups, Northern and Southern. The Northern Group, which on the 22nd June became No. 24 Group comprised the 46th and 48th Wings. For the purpose of operations this group came under the G.O.C. Northern Aircraft Defence Area. At this time No.33 Squadron was still in the 48th Wing.

On the 5th June 1918 Captain G.M. Turnbull assumed command of the squadron vice Major C.G. Burge. During the month Squadron Headquarters moved from Gainsborough and joined 'B' Flight at Kirton-in-Lindsey, and the squadron commenced to re-equip with Bristol

**\*The London Air Defence Area, comprising all H.D. squadrons south of the Wash with the exception of No.38 Squadron ,had been organised in August 1917.**



Fighters.

The last German airship raid on Great Britain occurred on the 5th August 1918. Five airships arrived off the Norfolk coast between 8.30 and 9.30 in the evening, four of which dropped bombs harmlessly into the sea. These bombs were heard at Bedford (ninety-five miles away), and Weedon (115 miles). Weedon reported these bombs as sixteen miles away, which caused the alarm to be given to central England. The same bombs would appear to have been heard at Langwith near Sheffield (about 120 miles), but were reported as north-east of the post, either owing to some acoustic trick of the atmosphere, or owing to a mistake for south east in transmission.

The Officer Commanding No.33 Squadron received the warning just after half-past nine, but owing to adverse weather conditions, (a pilot who tested the conditions in the air at Kirton-in-Lindsey reported clouds at 600 feet, and although he climbed to 3,000 feet failed to get through), and the absence of reliable information, he decided to wait until the weather was clearer before taking action.

The first aeroplane was despatched from Elsham at 10.30 p.m. and patrolled over Hull and Hedon until 12.30 a.m. Lieutenant F.A. Benitz, observer Second Lieutenant H.L. Williams, took off from Scampton in a Bristol Fighter at about the same time but descended at Atwick twenty minutes later with engine trouble. This was rectified and a second ascent was made at ten minutes past eleven and a patrol lasting one hour and three-quarters was carried out between Scampton and Waddington. On landing at Atwick the aeroplane crashed and Lieutenant Benitz was killed and his observer seriously injured.

In all two machines ascended from Elsham, one from Scampton and three from Kirton-in-Lindsey. On this occasion the raiding airships did not reach the line of the Squadron's patrol. It was during this raid that L.70 was brought down in flames, in the sea, about eight miles north of Wells-next-the-sea at 10.15 p.m. by Major E. Cadbury D.S.O., observer Captain R. Leckie D.S.O. from the Yarmouth Air Station.

The duties of the squadron from now onwards consisted for the most part in the training of night-flying pilots and observers. It will be remembered that the system of combining training with Home Defence duties had been found unsatisfactory in 1916 and had resulted in the formation of the Home Defence Wing. In the spring of 1917, however, owing to the fact that there was only one 'Depot' Squadron i.e. No.98, to supply the needs of the whole of the Home defence Group, it became necessary for Home Defence Squadrons to take in pupils in order to cope with the increasing demands for pilots created by the rapid

expansion of the Home Defence Group.

At the beginning of 1918 the position in the North was that squadrons equipped with F.E. aeroplanes, of which No. 33 Squadron was one, received partly trained pilots from Night Training Squadrons, for passing out in their advanced tests, which consisted of:- 100 miles night reconnaissance, a written examination on night flying armament and equipment, and work required of night flying pilots overseas, all aerial navigation tests, and ten hours night flying. On completion of these tests pilots were considered qualified night pilots and were posted to light night bombing squadrons overseas or were retained as operation pilots on F.E.s in the Service Squadrons. Night-flying observers were also under training in these squadrons and similar tests were laid down for these observers to pass before qualifying.

In June 1918 the first night fighting squadron was formed in the VI brigade and sent overseas. After this the Southern Service Squadrons fell a good deal below strength in Pilots, and it became evident that in order to maintain the supply of Pilots for these Squadrons, and the additional Night Fighting Squadrons contemplated for overseas it would be necessary to find a fresh source for Scout Pilots.

It had been obvious for some time that F.E.s in the North were useless for operational purposes owing to their low ceiling. It was therefore decided to re-equip the Northern Service Squadrons with 110 H.P. Le Rhone Avros. When fitted with a Lewis gun and used as a single-seater these aeroplanes were found to possess a ceiling of approximately 18,000 feet. It was hoped that Pilots for the Southern Service Squadrons and for the Night Flying Squadrons could then be obtained by withdrawing from the Northern Service Squadron Pilots who had been flying these aircraft for some time and who could easily proceed to 'Camels' after a short course.

The pilots in the VI Brigade had now automatically fallen into three principal classes:-

- (a) Day and Night Fighting Pilots i.e. Pilots available for defence purposes in the three Southern Wings, or for posting to Night Fighting Squadrons overseas.
- (b) Northern Defence Pilots for defence purposes in the North, and ultimate conversion to Day and Night Pilots.
- (c) Light Night Bombing Pilots for training in the F.E. Night Training Squadrons, and despatch to the Light Night Bombing Squadrons overseas.

In August 1918 it was decided to divide the training of these pilots into three stages, called tests for Categories 'A', 'B' and 'C'. No.33 Squadron which was being re-equipped with 110 H.P. Le Rhone Avros, received

pupils from an Elementary Night Training Squadron where they had passed the tests for graduation to Category 'A' which comprised:- day and night ground gunnery, elementary aerial navigation and fifteen hours solo flying. No.33 Squadron then passed them out in the test for graduation to Categories 'B' and 'C', which included advanced gunnery, advanced aerial navigation, day aerial fighting, day cross country flying, sixty and 100 miles night reconnaissances, bomb dropping by day and by night, wireless tests and ceiling tests (17, 000 feet) repeated monthly.

On passing these tests the Pilot became a Northern Defence Operation Pilot and after three months service in a Northern Defence Squadron was posted to an F.E. Training Squadron for a short course on F.E.s prior to proceeding overseas as a Light Night Bombing Pilot or to a 'Camel' Training Squadron for conversion into a Day or Night Fighting Pilot on 'Camels'.

The squadron took over a further duty in August when arrangements were made with the Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander Leeds for aeroplanes to fly over the Sheffield A.A. Defences on occasions when the weather was suitable, to afford practice to the A.A. Gunners and searchlights.

One more duty which the squadron might have been called upon to perform was in the event of an attempted Enemy Invasion, in which case No.33 Squadron together with No.75 Squadron was to be allotted to the G.H.Q. Home Forces as a Reserve Squadron.

Little remains to be said. Squadron Headquarters and the Flights remained at their respective stations until 13th June 1919 on which date the Squadron was disbanded.

#### **Editor's Postscript:**

The Armistice of November 1918 became the starting point for many years of difficulties for the fledgling Royal Air Force. The immediate effect was virtual decimation of its existing strength, as demobilisation of RAF personnel swiftly drained its manning. At the armistice date the RAF was composed of 27 333 officers, over half were pilots, and 263 837 non-commissioned men. By 3 January 1920, 26 087 officers, 21 259 cadets and 227 229 non-commissioned ranks had left the service. Of the 99 squadrons along the Western front in November 1918, only five still existed by October 1919, and this dropped to just one squadron—No.12 Squadron—by the end of that month.

In August 1919 the new, distinctive rank titles for the RAF became official, replacing the Army ranks used since the RAF's inception in 1918, but the existence of the RAF as a separate force had become a bone of contention between the Admiralty and the War Office, as

you will read in the next article. Both the Navy and the Army pressed strongly for the retention of the own air arms and the dissolution of the RAF.

Fortunately, on 11 January 1919, Sir Hugh Trenchard once more became Chief of the Air Staff and at Churchill's request he compiled a memorandum outlining his personal proposals for the construction of the peacetime RAF. Limited financially by the Cabinet, with the Air Estimates for the next five years capped at £15 million per annum, Trenchard based his proposals on constructing a permanent foundation for the RAF upon which future expansion could always be accomplished. He placed the bulk of his operational squadrons overseas to police the empire and mandated territories, which would prove to be the main *raison d'être* for the RAF's peacetime existence. The most significant proposals of Trenchard's memorandum concerned the questions of training and technical development. On 5 February 1920, the RAF College opened at the former RNAS airfield at Cranwell. He also inaugurated an Aircraft Apprentice scheme to train skilled technical tradesmen, who enlisted at 15-17 years of age and received a three-year apprenticeship at No 1 School of Technical Training at Halton. He also recommended the formation of an RAF Staff College as soon as possible, opening at Andover on 4 April 1922, along with various training establishments for flying, navigation, wireless, photography, naval and army 'co-operation' schools. On these limited but solid foundations the RAF was able to consolidate during 1919-1920.

33 Squadron would reform at Netheravon on the 1st March 1929 as No.33 (Bomber) Squadron and was equipped with Horsley Bombers. Its first Commanding Officer, Squadron Commander Francis P. Don was posted to the squadron on the 10th April 1929.

## GAINSBOROUGH'S WAR STORY—BOOK 4

### THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE "GAINSBOROUGH NEWS" 1917

- 33 Squadron - Royal Flying Corps arrive in Gainsborough
- Arras
- Passchendaele
- Cambrai
- Alfred Martlew



BY PETER E. BRADSHAW



Funeral cortège of Lieutenant James Arthur Menzies, R.F.C. - "Killed in Action During Air Raid" - 24.9.1917

LOYALTY readers who have been following the history of the Squadron after it formed at Bristol Filton aerodrome in January 1916 will know that eight of 33 Squadron's officers were buried in Gainsborough General Cemetery between January 1917 and August 1918. Those officers were:

Lieutenant John Bernard Brophy RFC (Canadian)  
Died 24 Dec 16

Lieutenant James Arthur Menzies RFC (Canadian)  
Died 25 Sep 17

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hubert Philip Solomon RFC (NZ)  
Died 20 Oct 17

Lieutenant John Augustus Harman RFC (English)  
Died 17 Nov 17

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Carey Pinnock RFC (Canadian)  
Died 30 Nov 17

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Frederick James Livingstone RFC (NZ)  
Died 12 Jan 18

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Laurens Jacoates van Staden RAF(SA)  
Died 26 Apr 18

Lieutenant Frank Allyn Benitz RAF (Argentinian)  
Died 5 Aug 18

The Squadron owes a huge debt of gratitude to Mr Peter Bradshaw and the Friends of the Gainsborough Cemetery Chapel for organising the restoration and repair of several of the headstones that commemorate these Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force officers who lost their lives. Having noted the sad state of the once pristine, broken and dilapidated monuments, with crosses lying on the ground or leaning haphazardly against the headstones, and lettering obscured through years of weathering, Peter and the team coordinated the efforts of the Gainsborough branch of the Royal British Legion, the Gainsborough Town Council, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Lincolnshire Cooperative Society, who agreed to pay for half of the cost of the restoration and provided masons to carry out the restoration work, to return the headstones to the former glory. Two formal ceremonies





**2nd Lieutenant Frederick James Livingstone Royal Flying Corps.  
Died 12 January 1918.  
Buried in Gainsborough Cemetery.**





**2nd Lieutenant Laurens Jacoates van Staden, Royal Air Force.  
Died 26 April 1918.  
Buried in Gainsborough Cemetery.**



**Lieutenant Frank Allyn Benitz, Royal Air Force.  
Died 5 August 1918 .  
Buried in Gainsborough Cemetery.**



were held at Gainsborough Cemetery, in November 2011 and April 2012, to mark the restoration of the headstones. The ceremonies were attended by members of 33 Squadron, including the current 33 Squadron Crewman Leader, then Flight Sergeant now Flight Lieutenant Niall Davidson. Peter's book contains a photograph of the attendees, along with a photograph of two Puma helicopters parked up on a visit to Trent Valley Academy in August 2012, where Peter was the Assistant Principal.

As mentioned at the start of this series of articles detailing 33 Squadron's formative years during World War One, Peter Bradshaw authored the excellent book 'Gainsborough's War Story-Book 4' (ISBN No: 978-0-9930209-3-3) in which Chapter 14 is devoted entirely to 33 Squadron Royal Flying Corps' arrival in Gainsborough and its subsequent activities in the area. The 70-page chapter contains an incredible amount of newspaper reports, official and private photographs, personal letters, maps and official investigation reports, all detailing the Squadron's activities and losses until the end of the war; it is an incredibly well researched, treasure trove of information regarding 33 Squadron's early years.

The book had a very limited print run which sold out very quickly, so I am pleased to write that the Association recently presented a copy, signed by the author, to Wing Commander Royston-Airey for the 33 Squadron History Room. It is hoped that the Association will conduct a battlefield tour of 33 Squadron's WW1 bases later this year which will include a visit to the Cemetery to pay our respects to the first of 33's fallen brothers in arms, and meet up with Peter again.

On 1 September 2017 a Memorial Wall was opened at the Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop, commemorating all of the Servicemen and women who have died in service flying for the British Army, from the early pioneers who first took to the air in the 1870s to the present day Army Air Corps. The circular memorial, consisting of 39 panels, lists the names of aircrew, support staff and ground crews and includes twelve of the men who died while serving with No 33 (Home Defence) Squadron RFC. No.33 Squadron lost two more men after the formation of the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918—Lieutenants Van Staden and Benitz—but as they were officially Royal Air Force officers at the time of their deaths their names do not appear on the wall.



The Memorial Wall, Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop

# 1 April 1918 – *Flight Magazine* marks an epoch

## FLIGHT & AIRCRAFT ENGINEER

April 4, 1918

### EDITORIAL COMMENT

#### The Royal Air Force

On Monday last the Royal Air Force officially came into being and marked the consummation of all the efforts that have, for three years of war, been made in the direction of manufacture and operation than was possible under the now departed system of dual control. It is certainly not too much to say that the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1918, marks an epoch in the history of the fighting forces of the British crown. It has seen called into active being a new Service which, we are fully convinced, will in time to come rival in magnitude the older Services from which it has sprung, even if it does not dwarf them into comparative insignificance. The future safety of the Empire is in the air as well as on and under the sea, and it is thus impossible to look into that future without being forced to the irresistible conclusion that, while armies as we know them now – and even fleets – may disappear as a means of practical war, our aerial navies must and will continue to increase and multiply until the millennium, when there shall be no more war.

As a matter of fact, when we speak of the disappearance of armies as we know them now it is in a spirit of sober vision and of calculated outlook that we make use of the phrase. It is because we believe that in the very near future aircraft will render impossible the employment of masses of men on the ground that we speak as we do. There may be some who think we go too far in this, and who hold that even in their highest development aircraft can be no more than an arm subsidiary to ground armies and fleets at sea. Certainly it is an arguable proposition, but to our way of thinking there can be no better answer to such a line of reasoning than to point to the enormous developments which have already taken place – developments that have already compelled the separation of the Flying Services from their elder sisters. The single fact that in less than four years the aerial arm has grown from a veritable toy adjunct to our field armies into a gigantic separate service whose activities are in all human probability destined to be decisive of the issues of the greatest war in history, is earnest enough of still greater things to come. Further than that, we can see the writing on the wall in the things that are happening on the Western front now. Day by day and night after night our air squadrons are making every movement hideous to the enemy. They have searched his bivouacs and concentration areas with bombs and machine gun fire; caused holocausts of casualties in his ranks; and have done far more than is yet realised in the holding up of his massed advance. In fact, it is probably not going too far to say that had it not been for the magnificent work of the *personnel* of what is now the Royal Air Force, the results of the battle, so far as they fall to be written now, would have been far more disquieting to the Allies. As a matter of fact, it is within our knowledge that this is an understatement of the case, but more cannot be said about the work of the British airmen in the great Battle of the

Somme until the necessarily fragmented stories which are current today have been sifted and pieced together. When that time comes we shall be able to dimly realise what the army and the Empire owe to the self-sacrificing devotion of the R.A.F.

That, however, is not precisely what we had in mind. As we get the stories of the air fighting of the past fortnight it seems increasingly clear that the battles of the future will be fought in the air, if only because the development of the aerial arm will make it impossible to maintain ground armies. When the summit of development has been reached it will be impossible to maintain communications; lines of position will be untenable under the searching attack of aircraft; armies will find it impossible to manoeuvre without being decimated by fire from the air; everything will be driven either underground or into the air. The logical sequence of this is that the ground army – as we must call it – having lost its whole *raison d'être*, must disappear, and war will be transferred into the air. That seems to us to be as certain as that night follows day, and, pursuing the line of thought, it is easy to foresee the time when the armies shall have ceased to exist, except as the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the Air Services, and the latter will have the whole business of fighting to itself. That is, unless – as we all most devoutly hope – Armageddon shall have taught the nations of the earth that there are more glorious and more profitable concerns than war and have decided them that there shall be no more. But we fear that so long as there are nations, and so long as human nature endures as it is, the *ultima ratio regum* (Ed: the final argument of kings ie war.) will remain.

## FLIGHT & AIRCRAFT ENGINEER

January 1, 1920

### EDITORIAL COMMENT

#### The Future of the Air Service

The announcement that the trail has been blazed from one end of Africa to the other comes at an opportune moment to focus attention on the utterly unsatisfactory position of the Air Ministry under its present constitution. As The Times aptly puts it, the Air Ministry remains the Cinderella of the public services. The prime Minister, in spite of all the reasoned criticisms which have been levelled at his policy, still persists in placing it under the control of the Secretary for War. A fortnight ago the Chancellor delivered himself of the opinion that the control of civil aviation might very shortly pass to the Board of trade. Fortunately, the latter idea has been promptly disposed of by Mr Churchill himself, so that there is no need to elaborate it – it can be relegated to the limbo of the things that are better forgotten.

It does not look as though the Government had any policy at all regarding the future of this most important Service. Frankly, we had rather they announced one with which we

could disagree entirely and from beginning to end than that the present state of uncertainty should persist. There are several aspects of the question which we view with the greatest misgivings. It is not without significance that at the time when, as we have repeatedly pointed out, the Government seems to have no mind of its own, there should have arisen what seems to be a calculated campaign for a reversion to the bad old order of things in which the Air Service was simply an inconsiderable adjunct of the Navy and Army. Sailors and soldiers – particularly the former and those who voice the opinions of the navy in the Press – are at great pains to prove to the Government and the public that the only way in which we can secure ourselves against an attack from the air is to place the Air service again in a subordinate position to the older services. We can appreciate the point of view of naval and military officers of senior rank and years of service. They are doubtless absolutely sincere in their convictions, but the worst of it is that they regard the question from an insular standpoint, which looks upon the Navy or the Army as the case may be as the first and only thing that matters, all other services and things being merely auxiliary to that older Service with which they are associated. Therefore, without presuming to doubt the *bona fides* of any concerned, it is possible to argue that they are prone to ignore the lessons of War and to allow Service conservatism to narrow their vision.

It seems to us that there are two factors which count, and two only. These are the lessons of the past and the probabilities of the future. As regards the former, we would point out that it was only when the Air Force was established as a separate Service that we secured real efficiency in the air, either by sea or land. We agree that that efficiency was hastened by the efforts which had been put forth earlier, but no-one who watched with grave misgivings the ruinous competition of the two Services during the earlier years of the War can have any but the opinion that the creation of the separate Air Service enabled us to secure aerial supremacy over the enemy at a much earlier date than it could have been attained, if at all, under the new regime. That is going as far as any whole-hearted advocate of the separate Air Service would go.

### **Fallacious Arguments**

Some of the arguments which are being adduced for a return to the old system seem to be utterly fallacious and merely designed to confuse the issues. For example, a well-known naval writer, Mr. Leyland, in a letter to the Press says: "It is probable that the possibility of attack from the air may yet affect the Navy profoundly, and it seems, therefore, imperative that the Navy should be master of its own means. If torpedoes are to be dropped by aeroplanes, they must be dropped by naval officers thoroughly acquainted with the torpedo and its use. The naval air officer must surely be as truly a naval officer as the gunnery or torpedo officer. He must not be merely embarked in an aircraft carrier as an officer owing allegiance to another Force."

Again we understand the point of view of the naval writer who has given his life to the study of naval war—and knows little or nothing of war in the air. The latter is the trouble, first, last and all the time. But if we understand it we certainly do not agree with it. All these arguments are quite

capable of being turned the other way about. It is just as easy to make out a case for the Air Service officer by saying that it is essential that the officer who drops the torpedoes must be an officer highly skilled in flying, with an intimate knowledge of the actual technical side of his profession, and that his actual qualifications regarding the torpedo itself need not be high. He has nothing to do but manoeuvre for position in attacking an enemy craft and having got into it, to drop his weapon which has been set for depth and course before he took the air at all. Surely, it is not the intention of the authorities of the Air Ministry that officers of the Air Force should know nothing about the weapons that they will have to use in war and that their training should be confined absolutely to the mere flying of their machines? Yet if we are to accept such arguments as this of Mr. Leyland's at their face value this is what is contemplated. Such a proposition is merely grotesque. Then, the same writer tells us that: "The Naval Air Service cannot be a mere offshoot of a distinct Service. It must surely be an integral part of the Navy, trained by it, under its direction, and always under its control."

That is very well in its way, but is scarcely convincing to the other side. It has been laid down already that the air squadrons which will operate with the Navy will be to a very great an integral part of the Navy, be trained by, be under the direction of, and always under the control of the naval commander-in-chief. They will, in fact, stand in pretty much the same relation to the Navy as do the Royal Marines. The latter are administratively a separate Service from the Navy, yet under naval command when afloat or serving on detachment at naval stations, almost exactly as we understand will be the case with the units of the Air Force similarly employed. If the system works well in the one case, as we know it does, then why not in the other? The whole fact of the matter is that the agitation is born of the inherent dislike of the older Service men to anything in the shape of innovation, even when the latter takes the shape of reform.

Nevertheless, it is a regrettable fact that the agitation is being fostered by the delay of the Government to pronounce upon a definite policy in regard to the future of the Air Service, and it will go on increasing until such policy has been laid down. In the meantime, it almost looks as though the Government were waiting until the agitation had grown to such dimensions as would apparently justify a reversal of the policy laid down at the end of 1917 in the Air Force and enable them to say that the whole weight of responsible naval and military opinion is against the continuance of the separate Air Service and it had therefore been decided, etc. We trust the representatives of the Air Party in both Houses will be very much on their guard against anything of the sort.

### **FLIGHT & AIRCRAFT ENGINEER**

**January 29, 1920**

### **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

It is abundantly clear that there is a very strong current of naval and military opinion - to apply the mildest possible term - in favour of abolishing the Royal Air Force as a separate Service and making it again a simple auxiliary of the older Services. Col. Repington, in the *Morning Post*, is the latest



exponent of this school of thought and devotes, in a recent issue of that journal, a column and a half to a review of the Trenchard memorandum, and, incidentally, to proving that the Air Force can never, within the limits of present vision, aspire to be anything more than auxiliaries of the Navy and Army.

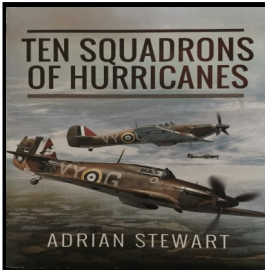
He makes the point that, from a Service point of view, it is necessary that the Air Force should be prepared to operate in the closest co-operation with the other Services, and should not arrogate to itself an independent strategic role, though it may be occasionally be allotted such a role for some special politico-military end. If the Air Force succeeds in its mission and performs the duties laid upon it by the chiefs of the Navy and Army, then it will take its legitimate shares in defence, and the Services can be well content for it to remain under a separate Ministry for preliminary training and research. But if the fact of separation causes it to aspire to independence of strategic control, then it is probable that the Navy and Army will unite in opposition to it, and will be compelled to demand that the Air Service for Navy and Army shall be replaced under the Admiralty and the War Office.

Now, all this is simply assertion, unbacked by sound argument, and so far as we have gone there is only one statement with which we are disposed to agree, and that is that the opinions expressed represent "the Service point of view" - as evolved in the smoking room of "The Rag." What real argument is there against the aspiration of the Air Service to assume strategic control of war in its own element? We do not say, at the moment, that the Air Service actively contemplates anything of the sort, but it may quite conceivably have to do so at some time in the future and again we ask: Why not? If we go back through history we find the very same situation arising in the relations between the land and sea forces of the Crown. It was not until Elizabethan times that the seamen exercised the right of "arrogating to themselves an independent strategic role." Until then the seaman was merely a navigator, whose duty it was to obey the orders of the soldier and place his ship where the latter wanted it, so that he could do his fighting in conditions approximating as nearly as possible to those of war on land. It was the army which exercised all the strategic, and even the tactical, control of war at sea, and if we were possessed of the contemporary records showing the heated discussions which undoubtedly took place when the seamen awoke to the realisation that the sea affair was one for them, and that war on land and war at sea were a totally different business, we should find the soldiers advancing the same arguments as those which are being used now in the matter of the Air Service, and its relations with the others.

If we except the remote period before the Christian era and deal only with the wars commencing with the Conquest, we shall appreciate that no sea battles were actually decisive of a war, by themselves, until we come to the affair of the Spanish Armada. Sea power was, until then, always a mere auxiliary of land power, and such sea battles as were fought were fought to clear the communications in order to land armies in the enemy's country. It is true that sea power is exercised partly to that end now, as we know from the lessons of the recent war, in which our Navy kept the seas for the safe passage of our own and our Allied troops. But

that is not its only role. There is a separate and distinct strategic bearing in maritime war which may be totally unrelated to war on land, and it is important to note that this does not seem to have been adequately realised until, at the earliest, the reign of Henry VIII, when the Navy Office and Trinity House were established. Indeed, we should prefer to put it that it was in the time of Elizabeth that real enlightenment began.

It is intensely interesting to see how history is in the process of repeating itself. Ten years ago the meaning of air power was not realised, except as a purely abstract proposition. Six years ago the dawning of that realisation was at hand, but the Air Service was the humblest of handmaidens to the older Services. Under the influence of war the Service grew, and as it grew, those who had fostered it began, as did the seamen of the 16th century, to see that there lay in the future a role for the new Service far beyond and of infinitely more importance than the auxiliary services hitherto given by the new arm. They saw that, as it is possible for either a Navy or an Army to make decisive war without calling upon the other for aid, so might - so undoubtedly will - air power be called in to decide wars without the interference of either. No doubt that is heresy to the seniors of the older Services, but it is just as certain that when seamen were urging their right to make war in their own way without the interference of the soldiers there was much wagging of grey beards in the taverns of the time, and many strange oaths were sworn because of the presumption of these ignorant mariners. But the ignorant mariners were right, and they had their way - and the course of the history of war has justified them. To our way of thinking, the analogy is well-nigh perfect and, until sound argument replaces mere assertion of opinion, we shall continue to believe that air power is as important to our existence as either sea or land power. And by air power we do mean mere strength in auxiliaries to the older Services, but a self-contained and strong Air Force, separate entirely, except with the reservations we have admitted on many previous occasions, from the administration and control of either the Admiralty or the War Office.



# The Desert and the Balkans:

## No. 33 Squadron

### Prologue

In February 1925 Sydney (later Sir Sydney) Camm, who that year became Chief Designer at H.G. Hawker Engineering, the privately owned predecessor of Hawker Aircraft Limited, proposed a monoplane fighter to be armed with two Vickers machine guns and powered by a Bristol Jupiter engine. His suggestion met with no favour and never progressed beyond the drawing board. Camm therefore continued with his biplane designs and in July 1929 there appeared on the Hawker stand at the Olympia Aero Show a light bomber and an interceptor fighter, both biplanes, both with a Rolls-Royce Kestrel engine and both winning widespread admiration from all who saw them. Camm is reputed to have expressed a preference for designing fighters, so he must have taken great pleasure in his Hawker Hornet which, after further trials and the installation of a more powerful version of the Kestrel engine, became the Fury; this entered RAF squadron service in May 1931. Yet his Hawker Hart light bomber was only marginally less beautiful and would have a far greater influence on the future.

The Hart had first flown in June 1938 with a top speed of 184 mph, some 10 mph in excess of any existing RAF fighter. Over 1 000 Harts would be built – a huge number in peacetime – and in addition it formed the basis for a number of derivative types, collectively called Hart Variants, of which over 1 800 were produced. There was an improved bomber version called the Hind, a fighter version named the Demon, a naval reconnaissance aircraft with folding wings and floats known as the Osprey, and the army co-operation Audax. The latter in turn led to the Hector, an improved version, the Hardy for use in Iraq and the Hartbees (or Hartebeeste as it was sometimes known) for use in South Africa.

In February 1930 Harts entered service with 33 Squadron and in that year's Annual Air Defence Exercises they proved quite impossible to intercept. They repeated their successes in 1931, hitting Northolt aerodrome with tennis balls marked 'bombs' before they could be engaged. Only the Harts' fighter cousins, the Demons, were capable of intercepting them and their performance was only marginally superior. Even the Fury, shortly to enter RAF service, would not solve the problem posed by the Harts, for with a top speed of 207 mph and an inadequate armament of two Vickers machine guns, it could be regarded as no more than a



Hawker Hart K2443 B Flight 33 Squadron 1932  
([www.aviationphotocompany.com](http://www.aviationphotocompany.com))

useful 'stop-gap'.

It was clear that the RAF desperately needed a new, improved fighter and in an attempt to obtain one the Air Ministry issued Specification F7/30. This called for an interceptor that would be capable of operating by day or by night, attain a top speed of 250 mph, mount four Vickers machine guns and, it was suggested, be powered by the new Rolls-Royce Goshawk engine. Camm's candidate was the PV3, an improved version of the Fury with a Goshawk engine but the eventual winner was the Gloster Gladiator. The most significant effect of the Specification though was to convince many people that no further development of the biplane could be expected., so future advances must be sought elsewhere. The need for those would soon become increasingly apparent.

On 30 January 1933 Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Faced with an atmosphere of growing international tension Britain's National Government proposed on 19 July 1934 that the RAF should be increased by forty-one squadrons within five years to face the mounting threat from Germany; it was also vital that it should do so with aircraft of vastly improved quality. Sydney Camm's reaction to the situation was simple and practical. If the RAF needed a better fighter than the Gladiator, then he would provide one. Camm abandoned his beautiful biplanes and turned to the future and the monoplane, and to a tough little killer that he called the Hurricane.

## Chapter 8

### The Desert and the Balkans

#### 33 Squadron

Among the units that were already stationed in the Middle East at the time that they first received Hurricanes, it is perhaps surprising to find 33 Squadron since this had once been a notable bomber unit. In February 1930 it had become the first squadron to receive the Hawker Hart. It was rightly proud of this distinction and therefore adopted a Hart's head as the squadron badge. In October 1935 it had moved to Egypt and here in February 1938 it gave up its Harts, not for more modern bombers but for Gloster Gladiator fighters.

Gladiators still formed 33's equipment in June 1940 when Mussolini's declaration of war put Egypt into the front line. It and the other fighter squadrons in the Middle East were understandably anxious to receive modern monoplane interceptors but, unfortunately, it was not easy to oblige them. In June, Hurricanes were sent through France and thence via Tunisia and Malta to Egypt.

These missions came to an end when France surrendered. Thereafter, Hurricanes had to be shipped to the Middle East in crates, either directly across the Mediterranean or around the Cape of Good Hope. Even so, 33 received its first Hurricanes in September and more in October, though the squadron did not attain its full wartime complement until December.

Not that 33 Squadron waited until it had its full strength of Hurricanes before seeking out Italian warplanes. During the early months of the war in the Western Desert, its Gladiators recorded several victories, the Canadian Flying Officer Vernon Woodward gaining particular credit. In August Squadron Leader Johnson was posted and it would be Squadron Leader Charles Ryley who would first command 33 as a Hurricane unit. Ryley, incidentally, had previously flown Sunderland flying-boats (*with 230 Squadron* Ed).

On 31 October Ryley's men, then based on the airfield at Fuka, first saw action in their Hurricanes when they intercepted a raid by Savoia Marchetti SM79 bombers escorted by Fiat CR42 biplane fighters; two bombers were shot down while two others crash-landed and were written off. Tragically, 33 lost its first Hurricane pilot when the Canadian Flying Officer Leveille baled out and was killed when his parachute failed to open. Flying Officer St Quentin from Southern Rhodesia force-landed but was unhurt.

The squadron's next action came on 9 December, the first day of the first British offensive of the Desert War. The soldiers of the Western Desert Force were given superb support by 33's Hurricanes, ranging ahead of

the advancing British and Commonwealth troops, reporting the Italian's positions and movements, strafing enemy transport and clashing with CR 42s. That evening, however, 33 lost 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Fischer, a South African pilot, who failed to return from a reconnaissance mission.

On 11 December another 33 pilot did not come back from a lone patrol and was officially reported 'missing'. Happily, Flying Officer Charles Dyson was very much alive. He had encountered a number of CR 42s and claimed six shot down and one damaged before he had run out of ammunition, was hit and crash landed in the desert. He made his way back to his squadron on foot, rejoining it on 17 December. Dyson's story was received with incredulous amusement until a message was received from army sources, offering congratulations to the pilot who had 'shot down seven enemy aircraft'. Dyson was an experienced pilot who before the war had won a DFC for actions against insurgents in Palestine and would ultimately become a wing commander. The doubts entertained in 33 Squadron must have been resolved since Dyson was shortly to be awarded a Bar to his DFC.

During December 1940 and the first days of January 1941, 33 did in fact down a considerable number of Italian aircraft. In January 1941 Fiat G50 monoplane fighters would arrive in Libya, 33 having its first combat with them on the 6<sup>th</sup> when two were believed to have been shot down by Warrant Officer Goodchild. This supremacy proved decisive in ensuring that by 7 February, the British and Commonwealth land forces had captured the whole of Cyrenaica and annihilated the Italian army defending it. This happy situation was soon to vanish with the arrival in Libya of the Luftwaffe and the Afrika Korps, but 33 was not there to meet them. In mid-January 1941, 33 Squadron was rested and warned to be ready for a move to Greece.

On 19 February Squadron Leader Ryley led sixteen Hurricanes to Eleusis aerodrome near Athens by way of Crete. The ground crews reached Greece by sea a couple of days later. There was the occasional encounter with Italian aircraft, particularly by a detachment sent to Paramythia near the Albanian border, but 33 was most often tasked with escorting Blenheims in attacks on Valona harbour in Albania and on Italian warships and merchant vessels. It was on one such mission on 4 March that 33 had its first casualty in the Greek campaign when Warrant Officer Goodchild was shot down and killed by Fiat G 50s.

The main body of the squadron had gone to Larissa aerodrome in east-central Greece where, on 12 March, it was joined by a new CO, Squadron Leader Ryley having been promoted to wing commander. It is said that 33's pilots had hoped that one of their own flight commanders would take his place and were a first



disappointed and somewhat indignant to receive a former flight lieutenant from a rival Hurricane squadron in Greece, No 80. They would soon realize how lucky they were. Squadron Leader Marmaduke Thomas St John Pattle, known simply as 'Pat', was already recognized and respected as a superlative fighter pilot.



**Squadron Leader 'Pat' Pattle DFC & Bar RAF (IWM)**

In the early months of the war he had served with 80 Squadron in North Africa and had gained four victories flying Gladiators. It was not until 80 Squadron went to Greece in November 1940 that Pattle showed just what a brilliant pilot he was. By the time he took over 33 he had shot down well over twenty Italian warplanes and had received a DFC and Bar, awards made far more rarely to pilots in the Mediterranean theatre than to those stationed in Britain. As a flight commander he had proved to be a fine tactician and when he arrived at Larissa he was appointed station commander as well as 33's CO. Any doubters among his pilots were won over when he proved superior to all of them in mock dogfights.

The latter part of March brought little action for 33, apart from one hectic day on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. In the morning, the squadron escorted Blenheims in an attack on an airfield in Albania. Two Hurricanes were damaged by AA fire while Flying Officer Dyson was attacked on the return flight by Fiat G 50s and his Hurricane seriously damaged. The AA victims returned safely to base and Dyson got close to it before his engine finally ceased to function and he had to bale out, which he did without injury. That afternoon, the Hurricanes were ordered to strafe another Albanian airfield by themselves. On the way they were engaged by Italian fighters and although they drove these off, only Pattle and Woodward went on to attack the airfield and damage some Italian machines on the ground. Pattle was not pleased with his pilots, for it was typical of him that nothing would

distract him from carrying out a mission.

On 6 April German forces, strongly supported by the Luftwaffe, crashed into both Yugoslavia and Greece. Their blitzkrieg was spectacularly successful; it had overrun Yugoslavia by 17 April and mainland Greece by the end of the month. During that month, the pilots of 33 Squadron escorted Blenheims attacking, and themselves strafed German army units and raided enemy aerodromes, this time in Bulgaria. Chiefly though, they were engaged in fighting off large numbers of hostile aeroplanes. Some additional Hurricanes did arrive as reinforcements from time to time, the first six on 9 April, but once more the RAF faced terrifyingly high odds.

It is impossible to know full details of the achievements of No.33 and the other fighter squadrons in Greece. All official records were destroyed when the British and Commonwealth forces evacuated Greece, Operations and Intelligence Summaries were usually compiled from memory long afterwards and logbooks, diaries, letters written at the time and the later reminiscences of the survivors could often be unreliable. Nor can the German accounts be trusted to give the full picture. Instances of 'kills' not recorded in the official German returns but confirmed by witnesses on the ground or by the pilot baling out and being taken prisoner, or both, come from the Balkans, North Africa, Cyprus, Malta and the Malta convoys. It seems fair to suggest that 33's pilots gained more successes than those for which they have received 'official' credit.

So skilfully had 33 fought that it did not lose a man until 15 April when Larissa aerodrome was attacked by a formation of Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Flight Lieutenant John Mackie and Pilot Officer Charles Cheetham were shot down and killed. By now the British, Commonwealth and Greek armies were in full retreat. By 17 April 33 was back at Eleusis where it joined the other Hurricane squadron in Greece, No. 80. Both squadrons were placed under the tactical control of 'Pat' Pattle. Eleusis was strafed twice on 18 April and seven Hurricanes were damaged. The ground crews moved these into a hangar and by working all night made five of them fit to fly again. At dawn on the 19<sup>th</sup>, a raid by fifteen Junkers Ju 88s caught the defenders by surprise and, obviously well informed by good Intelligence work, struck unerringly at the one crucial hangar, destroying it and all seven Hurricanes. That was only the start of two days of torment as the Luftwaffe made very determined efforts to finish off the Allied fighter force. These included another strafing attack on the 20<sup>th</sup> that destroyed two of 33s aircraft on the ground and would have destroyed several more but for the action of Aircraftsman Cyril banks who jumped into a blazing petrol bowser and drove it away to a safe distance.



**33 Squadron at Larissa (IWM)**

(Above, left to right): Pilot Officer P.R.W. Wickham, Flying Officer D.T. Moir, Flying Officer V.C. "Woody" Woodward, Flight Lieutenant J.M. "Pop" Littler, Flying Officer E.H. "Dixie" Dean, Flying Officer F. Holman (k.i.a. 20 April 41), Flying Officer E.F. "Timber" Woods (k.i.a. 17 June 1941), Pilot Officer C.A.C. Cheetham (k.i.a. 15 April 1941), Flight Lieutenant A.M. Young, Squadron Leader M. St.J. "Pat" Pattle (Squadron Commanding Officer, k.i.a. 20 April 1941), Flying Officer H.J. Starrett (died of burns 22 1941), Flight Lieutenant G. Rumsey (Squadron Adjutant), Pilot Officer A.R. Butcher (p.o.w. 22 May 1941), Pilot Officer W. Winsland, Pilot Officer R. Dunscombe (k.i.a. 22 May 1941)



In the main though, the Hurricane units were whittled down by sheer attrition as they battled wave after wave of enemy aircraft. During the 19<sup>th</sup> they destroyed or damaged eleven of the raiders and added several more on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. During this time 33 lost three more vital Hurricanes, damaged beyond the repair facilities available, and Flying Officer 'Frank' Holman, trying to land his crippled Hurricane in a marshy field, broke his neck when the aircraft turned a somersault. The culmination of the German assaults came in the late afternoon of 20 April, Adolf Hitler's birthday. Over 100 German aircraft attacked shipping in Piraeus Harbour near Athens. To meet them, the RAF could muster only fifteen Hurricanes – six from 33 Squadron and nine from No.80 – all led by 33's Squadron Leader Pattle. Between them, they destroyed or damaged fifteen of the enemy but at a cost that could hardly be borne by their limited numbers.

From 33 alone, three Hurricanes were lost. Flight Sergeant Cottingham, though wounded, baled out safely, but the squadron mourned two gallant South Africans: Harry Starrett and Pat Pattle. On fire, knowing how precious every fighter was, Starrett tried to force-land at Eleusis. He set the aircraft down and had almost come to a halt when it exploded into a mass of flames. Starrett managed to get out of the cockpit, horribly burned, and died in hospital two days later. An even greater loss was 33's inspirational leader. Although a very sick man, Pattle destroyed a total of at least seven enemy aircraft, perhaps more, in the course of 19 and 20 April. The last of them came in this fight when he spotted a Hurricane in trouble with a Bf 110 on its tail. With hostile machine overhead he dived to help his colleague. He shot down the 110 but two others closed in on him from above. It seems that Pattle was killed by their fire, for he was seen to be slumped over the controls as his Hurricane plunged down into the sea. Pattle has rarely been accorded the respect that he deserves. His final total of victories is not known, some sources state over fifty; his biographer settled for 'at least forty'. He was surely the greatest Hurricane 'ace' of them all.

33 continued to cover the evacuation of the army from a new base at Argos, south-west of Athens, while reinforcements and the untiring efforts of the ground crews brought the total number of Hurricanes in Greece up to twenty by 23 April. That afternoon, however, thirteen of them were destroyed on the ground. Next morning the remaining seven flew to Crete, while the other pilots of 33 and 80 Squadrons were carried to Crete in aerial transports. Reinforcement Hurricanes were sent out to Crete from time to time, but there were never more than sixteen on the island. Not all of them were serviceable since there was a desperate shortage of spare parts. 33 and 80 Squadrons joined forces to form the composite

Hurricane Unit, Crete but, by the end of April almost all those of No.80 had been evacuated and in practice the Hurricane Unit, Crete became virtually just 33 Squadron.

During the first half of May 33's pilots had a number of encounters; they shot down at least two Junkers Ju 88s and damaged several others. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, however, most of 33's 'old hands' were evacuated and new, inexperienced pilots were flown in to replace them. Among the replacements was a new CO, Squadron Leader Edward Howell, a most experienced airman and instructor but he had never flown a Hurricane before. On his first sortie on 14 May, he shot down a Bf 109 and damaged another; he would lead 33 Squadron during the remainder of its stay on Crete and would shoot down a Junkers Ju 52 transport on 16 May. By 19 May 33 had had most of its aircraft destroyed on the ground, and only four Hurricanes remained serviceable, three of them with 33. These three, and three 'grounded' Gladiators, were flown back to Egypt. Their pilots were the only members of 33 to get clear before German paratroopers and gliders descended on Crete on 20 May. Less than half of 33's personnel were ultimately carried to safety by British warships or by Sunderlands.



**Vernon Woodward in Egypt (IWM)**

When 33's surviving pilots returned to Egypt they still had no new CO, so were led by Vernon Woodward, now a flight lieutenant and one of the few airmen who had served through the campaign in Crete. On 17 June he took 33 into its first combat since leaving Crete. It shot down a Junkers Ju 87 and a Fiat G 50 but lost Flying Officer Woods, another pilot who had been a member of the squadron from its early days in North Africa. In July, Squadron Leader James Marsden arrived to take over 33. In the period leading up to Operation CRUSADER, 33 gained few successes and lost twelve Hurricanes, with six pilots dead and two others POWs. Squadron Leader Marsden was shot down while protecting a convoy heading to the assistance of Tobruk, baled out and was rescued. Vernon Woodward



gained his final victory with 33 when he shot down a Junkers Ju 88 on 12 July. In September he was rested and took up a post as a flying instructor before later becoming CO of 213 (Hurricane) Squadron.

Operation CRUSADER opened on 18 November, and 33's luck changed. The squadron attacked Axis troop positions, motor vehicles and airfields and only encountered Fiat GR 42 biplanes. It shot down three of them, two falling to Pilot Officer Lance Wade, destined to become one of 33's greatest pilots. Wade was a citizen of the United States who joined the RAF as a volunteer in December 1940 and arrived in Egypt by way of Malta in September 1941. 'The Wildcat of Texas' would have plenty of opportunities to show his worth during November and December.

After 7 December 33 turned its attention to attacks on Axis transport, with strikes made regardless of heavy anti-aircraft fire and at very low level. On 2 December Sergeant Challis hit a parked Fiat CR42 with his wing tip, damaging both aircraft. On 5 December Lance Wade attacked at such low level his Hurricane was caught in the blast when the bomber he was firing at blew up and he had to force-land 25 miles behind enemy lines. Sergeant Wooler landed to assist but damaged his own Hurricane so badly that both were compelled to walk back to the British lines, which they reached safely next day. On 8 December Flight Lieutenant Derrick Gould did land and take off again with Flying Officer Charles, who had force-landed after being hit by flak, sharing his Hurricane. By a cruel trick of fate, Charles was killed on the 16<sup>th</sup> when he came in too low and crashed into the vehicle he was strafing. 33 paid for its successes with five more Hurricanes down, Flying Officer Dallas missing and Flying Officer Jewell a POW. The strain of his first command saw Squadron Leader Marsden returned to Britain and Derrick Gould, as senior flight commander, was deservedly promoted to squadron leader.

Gould soon faced another crisis. On 21 January 1942 Rommel commenced a brilliant counter-offensive and Eight Army was bundled back to Gazala. 33 Squadron was stationed at the forward airfield of Antelat, with No.112 Squadron. The airfield was largely waterlogged, leaving a strip only 500 yards long and 30 feet wide available for take-off, with the enemy advancing at speed. The ground crews responded magnificently. Two Hurricanes and four Kittyhawks had to be destroyed but the remaining aircraft were carried to the take-off area by twelve men under the wings and all got airborne safely, the last as German shells began falling on the airfield. From Msus 33 struck back, making devastatingly effective attacks on Axis motor transport columns well defended by anti-aircraft guns. On 23 January Pilot officer Edy was hit, crash landed in the desert and became a POW. On the 25th anti-aircraft gunners claimed another victim, Sergeant Nourse being

shot down and killed.

Thereafter, 33 fell back to a series of airfields east of Gazala and in early February was withdrawn from the fighting and later re-equipped with twelve Hurricane IIBs. It resumed offensive sweeps but lost five Hurricanes when it encountered a new enemy trick: dummy vehicles covered by strong anti-aircraft batteries. The pilots were able to bale out or crash land without serious injury. On 18 May 33 received a new CO, Squadron Leader John Proctor, a very experienced Hurricane pilot. He did not have a pleasant welcome to the Desert War, for he was hit by flak on 21 May and had to force-land, happily without injury.

On the night of 25/26 May, repelling raiders in the hours of darkness, Pilot Officer Inglesby and Sergeant Belleau shared in the destruction of a Junkers Ju 88. The raids were a prelude to a new offensive by Rommel that began the next morning. The RAF, driven from its forward airfields, could not provide protection to the garrison of Tobruk, against whom Kesselring hurled every Stuka that he could muster. Under cover of this 'aerial artillery' the Axis forces burst through the defensive perimeter and at dawn, on 2 June, Tobruk surrendered.

Sad to relate, while other Hurricane squadrons had had considerable success against Axis aeroplanes and even more against Axis motor transport, 33 Squadron had had a most unhappy time. It gained few victories over enemy aeroplanes and by 25 June it had lost three pilots killed and a fourth taken prisoner. It had also had seventeen Hurricanes destroyed or badly damaged, though ten of the seventeen were able to return to base despite their injuries. Even so, the pilots were no doubt grateful that they were pulled out of the fighting in order to be re-equipped with Hurricane IICs.

They would return to the front line on 1 July, and the situation was very different. Thrusting deep into Egypt, Rommel had exhausted his German troops and left his Italian units and the remains of his supporting air forces trailing well behind. When he reached the El Alamein 'bottleneck' his advance had crashed to a halt, as Kesselring and others had predicted. When 33 resumed operations it found few enemy aircraft for the first couple of days. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> though, one 33 pilot had a memorable experience. The New Zealander, Flight Lieutenant James Hayter was attacked by a Macchi MC 202 and his Hurricane was fatally crippled. However, the Macchi overshot and Hayter was able to pour a burst of fire into it. Both machines crash-landed and both pilots were unhurt. As the combat had taken place behind the British lines, the Italian pilot was taken prisoner.

By 3 July, the Germans had managed to get their air force up and attempted to use it to smash a way

through the British defences as it had done at Tobruk. 33 played its part in thwarting the enemy's intentions at the cost of one Hurricane, from which Sergeant Woolard baled out safely. It was now the Eighth Army's turn to take the offensive, trying from 4 July to comply with General Auchinleck's order to 'destroy the enemy as far east as possible and not let him get away as a force in being'. In all, Auchinleck launched five offensives but all were terribly badly prepared and executed, not least because there was hardly any co-operation between Army and Air Force, the headquarters of which had been moved miles apart. It would be too depressing to describe 33's part in these failures; suffice to say that it achieved a few successes but lost fifteen Hurricanes destroyed or badly in July, plus three more on 3 August, and eight of its pilots were killed.

Once more, 33 was glad to retire from the front line for a short time and when it returned to combat duty on 31 August a great deal had changed. In late July, Squadron Leader Proctor had been replaced by Squadron Leader James Finnis. Rommel was back on the attack, having received reinforcements that brought the numbers of the two armies closer than they had ever been before or would be again. Fortunately, Alexander and Montgomery were now in the Middle East, had given Eighth Army a new attitude and new tactics and restored its co-operation with the Desert Air Force. Montgomery made full use of his supporting airmen and from 7 September to the late evening of 23 October, when the Battle of El Alamein began, the Desert Air Force was preparing the way with sorties to report on and if possible 'soften up' enemy defences.

These preliminary missions were usually carried out at extremely low level, where 33's Hurricanes were very vulnerable to AA guns and attacks from above by enemy fighters. The squadron suffered only one casualty in September, when Sergeant Douglas crash-landed on the 11 and was put off its strength with burns and wounds. On 9 October 33 had a dreadful day, losing Flight Sergeant Learmouth killed and three other pilots POW. Nevertheless it kept up the pressure, its last combat before the Eighth Army offensive began taking place on the morning of 23 October. In this action, Sergeant Pointon was shot down but baled out and was later able to make his way back to base, while Pilot Officer Peterson balanced the books by downing a Messerschmitt Bf 109.

During the course of the battle, 33 Squadron would strafe enemy positions, lorries, troop-carriers and petrol bowsers, inflicting very heavy losses. It would also engage formations of enemy aircraft attempting to assault the Allied ground troops. On at least two occasions, in company with other Hurricane squadrons, it attacked groups of Junkers Ju 87s so fiercely that they

not only scattered but unloaded their bombs on their own soldiers. Again the low level missions were extremely dangerous and 33 had seven pilots killed in the course of the battle, among them Pilot Officer Peterson who, tragically, was shot down by Allied AA fire as he engaged a Stuka formation at which the gunners were already firing.

On 4 November 1942, Eighth Army finally broke through enemy defences and began an advance that eventually reached Tunisia. It was accompanied by the Desert Air Force that harried the retreating enemy, not without some sad losses, such as that of Squadron Leader Mannix on 18 November, a former flight lieutenant of 127 (Hurricane) Squadron who had recently been promoted to lead 33. At the end of the momentous year 1942, 33 ceased to take part in the advance and instead was charged with the defence of Benghazi and of Allied convoys in the Mediterranean.

On 12 February 1943 Sergeant McKillop had a fierce clash with a Junkers Ju 88 over one such convoy, shooting it down but being hit by return fire and forced to bale out. He was rescued by one of the vessels he had protected. In late February 1943 the squadron did move forward again to take over the defence of Tripoli. It also began to receive Spitfires to reinforce its Hurricanes. The Hawker fighters continued to fly protective patrols over convoys for several months to come and as late as May 1943 proved their worth in this role by downing a Junkers Ju 88 and a Heinkel He 111.

The squadron would later record victories with its Spitfires and, from February 1945, with the Tempests that replaced them. It ended the war not far behind 73 Squadron with an official score of just under 300 successes, exaggerated of course, but impressive all the same. Unlike 73, it had not achieved virtually every victory with one type of fighter, but those of its Spitfires, of its Tempests and, in earlier days, of its Gladiators, all put together did not equal those gained by its Hawker Hurricanes.

(Footnote: No.73 Squadron was credited with the greatest number of recorded victories for any single aircraft type in any RAF squadron, having recorded its 300th victory in December 1942 while flying Hurricanes. 73 Squadron converted to Spitfires in June 1943. The RAF squadron with the highest official score was No. 249 Squadron (Spitfire, Hurricane, Mustang) credited with 350 successes. Ed.)

**This condensed extract was reproduced from 'Ten Squadrons of Hurricanes' by Adrian Stewart with the kind permission of the publisher, Pen & Sword Military ([www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk)). The book provides a concise history of ten RAF squadrons that flew Hurricanes in a number of theatres during WW2, Chapter Nine deals with 33's rivals, No.80 Squadron. An excellent and fascinating book.**

### No. 33 Squadron Losses between 16 June 1941 and 6 May 1943

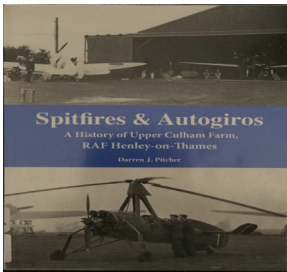
16 June 1941	Flt Lt HW Bolingbroke	(Gladiator N5759)	KiFA
31 October 1940	Fg Off EK Leveille (Canada)	(Hurricane I P3724)	
9 December 1940	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt JG Fischer (South Africa)	(Hurricane I)	MiA
4 March 1941	WO HJ Goodchild	(Hurricane I V7801)	
15 April 1941	Flt Lt Mackie (Canada)	(Hurricane I)	
15 April 1941	Plt Off Charles Cheetham	(Hurricane I)	
20 April 1941	Fg Off Frank Holman (Rhodesia)	(Hurricane I)	
20 April 1941	Sqn Ldr Pat Pattle (South Africa)	(Hurricane I)	
22 April 1941	Flt Lt Harry Starrett (South Africa)	(Hurricane I)	
mid-May 1941	Sgt Hill	(Hurricane I)	
Maleme Memorial Crete	AC2 CE Banks Cpl WH Caldwell Sgt RA Cross Plt Off RD Dunscombe (pilot) LAC K Eaton Sgt C Elson LAC JRB Green AC1 Hess Cpl WP Hutchinson AC1 C Johns LAC A Mair AC1 AS Pryor Sgt CD Ripsher (pilot) AC2 PG Smithson Sgt JM South LAC RG Stone LAC WH Trinder LAC CG White Cpl HG Whitehurst		
17 June 1941	Fg Off EJ Woods	(Hurricane I (Z4509))	
9 September 1941	2nd Lt FBM Bodmer	(Hurricane I Z4547)	
9 September 1941	Fg Off AG Crockett	(Hurricane I)	
14 September 1941	Fg Off LR Marshall	(Hurricane I Z4503)	
14 September 1941	Sgt CL Rogers (Australia)	(Hurricane I V7106)	
27 September 1941	Plt Off CC Lowther	(Hurricane I)	
5 October 1941	Plt Off DR Lush (Canada)	(Hurricane I Z4188)	PoW



5 October 1941	Sgt F Seamer (Australia)	(Hurricane I Z4768)	PoW
10 October 1941	Plt Off TC Patterson	(Hurricane I)	fate not shown
15 November 1941	Sgt RB Price	(Hurricane I 3980)	
20 November 1941	Fg Off Jewell	(Hurricane I)	MiA
26 November 1941	Flt Lt DSF Winsland	(Hurricane II)	PoW
16 December 1941	Fg Off PS Charles	(Hurricane I)	
December 1941	Fg Off Dallas		MiA - no details found
23 January 1942	Plt Off D Edy (Canada)	(Hurricane I)	PoW
25 January 1942	Sgt or Flt Lt LB Nourse	(Hurricane I)	
4 February 1942	Fg Off Tofield	(Hurricane I)	WiA
2 April 1942	Plt Off MacKenzie	(Hurricane IIb)	WiA
20 April 1942	Sgt Stott	(Hurricane IIb BG833 'D')	WiA
23 May 1942	Flt Lt DP Wade	(Hurricane IIb BG923 'Z')	
28 May 1942	Sgt GH Lyons	(Hurricane IIb Z5444)	
12 June 1942	Sgt W Cameron	(Hurricane IIb Z5143 'C')	
12 June 1942	Sgt Hall	(Hurricane IIb BG 917 'X')	PoW
15 June 1942	LAC Wiseman,		killed during Luftwaffe bombing attack at Gambut
16 June 1942	Sgt NW Callister	(Hurricane IIb Z5453)	KiFA
24 June 1942	Plt Off H Ingelsby	(Hurricane IIb Z5647)	MiA
4 July 1942	Plt Off AG Merritt	(Hurricane IIc BE469)	
5 July 1942	Plt Off BW Challis	(Hurricane IIc BN385)	
8 July 1942	Plt Off RE Wiggle RCAF	(Hurricane IIc BP181)	
8 July 1942	Sgt DA Morris	(Hurricane IIc BN116)	
16 July 1942	Plt Off EW Ollen-Brittle	(Hurricane BP179)	KiFA
20 July 1942	Sgt LH Moher	(Hurricane IIc BE134 'Y')	
24 July 1942	FS FG Davison	(Hurricane IIc BP120)	
24 July 1942	Sgt JB Waddell	(Hurricane IIc BN358 'H')	
27 July 1942	Sgt JD Leicester	(Hurricane IIc BP199 'C')	

3 August 1942	Sgt JA Kingdon	(Hurricane IIc BE409 'G')	WiA
2 September 1942	Plt Off GR Dibbs	(Hurricane IIc BN908 'V')	
11 September 1942	Sgt WE Douglas	(Hurricane IIc BP474 'N')	WiA
9 October 1942	FS NR Learthmouth	(Hurricane IIc BP548 'S')	KiA
9 October 1942	Fg Off DW McLarty	(Hurricane IIc BP546'J')	PoW
9 October 1942	Sgt HJ Bastian	(Hurricane IIc HL621 'M')	PoW
9 October 1942	Sgt JA Kingdon	(Hurricane IIc BP454 'L')	PoW
27 October 1942	Sqn Ldr RM Lloyd	(Hurricane IIc BP398)	MiA
27 October 1942	Plt Off Gardiner	(Hurricane IIc HV398)	
30 October 1942	Plt Off LH Peterson	(Hurricane IIc ...330)	KiA (lost to Allied AA fire)
3 November 1942	Sgt AN Ellis	(Hurricane IIc ..853)	WiA
3 November 1942	Sgt F Henfry	(Hurricane IIc BP161'P')	MiA
3 November 1942	Sgt RG Rennie	(Hurricane IIc BP358)	
4 November 1942	Plt Off H Steward	(Hurricane IIc BN501 'R')	
4 November 1942	Plt Off HJ Turner	(Hurricane IIc BP354'E')	died of wounds
18 November 1942	Sqn Ldr RL Mannix (OC33)(USA)	(Hurricane IIc ..154)	MiA
6 May 1943	Sgt JS Robinson	(Hurricane II ..314)	KiFA

**Information taken from *A History of the Mediterranean Air War 1940-1945 Volumes One, Two and Three* by Christopher Shores and Giovanni Massimello**



# RAF HENLEY ON THAMES

Extracts from 'Spitfires & Autogiros: A History of Upper Culham Farm'

by Darren J Pitcher

*There is a large montage displayed on the first floor of the MSHATF building at RAF Benson that shows the development of the RAF's Support Helicopter Force from the late 1930s/early 1940s to the present day. While military students can recognize most of the helicopters on the right hand side of the board, from around the Wessex onwards, looking back to the left and the early history of the Force leaves them guessing. Many times I have heard the Belvedere described as an early Chinook! They are often surprised when I tell them that the BEF had RW support in France in 1940, and their lack of knowledge started my research into the early days of RW flight and how it impacted on the SH Force we know today.*

*Many of us in the Association who have lived and worked at RAF Benson have probably, at some stage, had to drive or be driven to London Heathrow from camp, taking the route through Henley on Thames. As the A4130 climbs out of Henley up White Hill there are no obvious or visible signs to give away the location of the former World War Two RAF airfield, but activities at RAF Benson both during and some years after the war are tied to the airfield on the hill. Local historian Darren Pitcher wrote a short book about the history of RAF Henley on Thames that was well received by military aviation historians and copies are now hard to find. Fortunately the library in Henley has three copies, one for reference and two for lending. From this fascinating little book I was able to pull some details that offer a brief history of the RAF's presence at the small grass strip atop Crazies Hill, and its importance in making Benson the station it is today:*

The area had been used as a venue for one of Sir Alan Cobham's National Aviation Display days on Wednesday 19 June 1935 and included a demonstration of the 'wingless wonder' – the autogiro. Mr Pitcher points out that 'owing to its ability to fly slowly and hover in the air practically stationary it has been adopted by the London Police and has been used for control of road traffic'. The pilot was a Mr R J Ashley, who had been one of the best pupils at the Autogiro School at Hanworth Aerodrome in Middlesex.

As the threat of war grew in the late 1930s, the Air Ministry assessed many of the sites that Cobham used during his Displays, which had started in 1932, and considered Upper Culham Farm suitable for

development as an airfield. Flying Training Command decided that it could be used as a Relief Landing Ground (RLG). The work to clear the land and make a suitable landing ground started in late 1939 and continued through the harsh winter of 1940. Work was complete by early-mid 1940 and a 700-800 yard grass area was created as a landing site. Metal tracking was laid down to stop the surface breaking up in bad weather. The RAF constructed a few huts in the north-western corner of the field but not much else in terms of infrastructure, although a few more buildings were added throughout the war.

On 4 July 1940 Tiger Moths from 13 EFTS at White Waltham started to make use of the field for circuits and bumps. In August they started using the field at night. After eight courses had been completed and 400 officer and SNCOs trained, 13 EFTS moved to Peterborough in December 1940 due to airfield congestion at White Waltham. 8 EFTS, based at Woodley, took over control of the field on 3 February 1941. From 2 September 1941 night flying training was introduced at Henley for ab initio pupils. In accordance with HQFTC instructions, the Air Ministry decided that the airfield needed upgrading and had three blister hangars and several smaller huts constructed, including a domestic site for 270 personnel. With buildings now available, aircraft could be left overnight and the ground crew were able to stay there. When the majority of training pilots was transferred overseas, 8 EFTS was disbanded on 21 September 1942.

In late 1940 Supermarine Aviation (Vickers) Ltd were looking for factories and airfields away from its main factory in Southampton after bombing had seriously affected production at its Itchen and Woolston works. Lord Beaverbrook, Minister of Aircraft Production, and the Supermarine executives decided on a dispersal scheme consisting of four separate production areas. One of these areas was Reading, with the airfield at Henley to be used for the final assembly and test flying of the PR version of the Spitfire, the PR. IV. The PR.IV had the longest range of any of the early PR Spitfires. With 66 gallons of fuel in each wing it had a range of 2 000 miles. It was also the first PR Spitfire to have a heated cockpit and drinking water. As we can see on the gate guardian at Benson, the paint finish of these Spitfires was a tint of blue known as 'PR blue'.





**Avro Rota 1 DR624 'KX-L' of 529 (Rota) Squadron (RTR Collection)**



**Pilots of 529 (Rota) Squadron at Halton circa 1943**

**Back Row: F/O Jimmy Harper, F/O Norman Hill, F/O ?, F/O John Dennis, F/O Ford, F/O Jack Gillies, F/O 'Kiwi' Eade**

**Front Row: F/L Walsh, F/L Guy Turner, S/L Marsh, F/L Maurice Houdret, F/O Dunn (EngO)**

**(Photo: The Trenchard Museum, RAF Halton)**

From the details provided in Mr Pitcher's book, he suggests that as many as 222 PR Spitfires were assembled at Henley and flown by PR units at RAF Benson; sadly the gate guardian was not one of them. Other Spitfires were eventually assembled there, including the Mk V fighter variant and the very first PR. XIs. Three Robins hangars, workshops, an air raid shelter, petrol installation, stores and toilets were installed by the Air Ministry on the southern corner of the airfield in 1941 for the team of approximately 30 people who completed the final assembly. The aircraft was test flown and then delivered to a Maintenance Unit for the fitting of operational equipment. This process continued until the end of 1942, when the later, more powerful, marks of PR Spitfire needed a longer runway than was available at Henley for take-offs and landings. There were some 65 units spread over the Southern part of England as part of the Regional Dispersal scheme, 46 were involved with production with the remainder as support units. The hangars used for Spitfire production were placed on loan to the RAF in December 1944 and used by 529 (Rota) Squadron.

#### **No 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit**

In September 1938, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, had flown from Heston Aerodrome to Germany three times in two weeks for talks with Adolf Hitler, and had returned to Heston from the Munich Conference on 30 September 1938 with the paper referred to in his later "Peace for our time" speech from 10 Downing Street. Heston Aerodrome had been opened in 1929 and was a popular airfield for several fledgling airline companies. The decision to develop Heathrow as London's primary airfield after the war saw Heston close in 1947; part of the site would later be developed into the Heston Motorway Services on the M4.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, on 24 September 1939 the Royal Air Force formally took over the 'Heston Flight', a civilian photo reconnaissance unit headed by Sidney Cotton that was based at Heston Aerodrome. The unit had previously been contracted by MI6 to perform clandestine photographic reconnaissance over Europe, using civilian-registered Lockheed 12A aircraft. The Flight was redesignated several times, first on 1 November 1939 as No. 2 Camouflage Unit, then on 17 January 1940 as the Photographic Development Unit, then on 18 June 1940 the Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.

The Luftwaffe bombed Heston Aerodrome on 19 September 1940, and a German parachute mine demolished the 'Dawbarn' hangar and damaged several

of the PRU's aircraft. Following the mine incident, and another change of title on 14 November, No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit was transferred to RAF Benson on 27 December 1940. The unit was steadily equipped with a variety of aircraft modified for the photographic reconnaissance role, including Supermarine Spitfires built in the Reading area and assembled at RAF Henley, Bristol Blenheims, Lockheed Hudsons and de Havilland Mosquitos.

On 18 October 1942, 1 PRU was disbanded and the individual Flights of the Unit were re-designated as five separate squadrons: Nos. 540, 541, 542, 543 and 544 Squadrons.

#### **No 529 (Rota) Squadron**

No 529 Squadron arrived at Henley between 16-18 August 1944 from its base at RAF Halton, due to the threat posed by German rocket attacks on London. With the arrival of the Squadron, Henley became a proper RAF station and now had aircraft and personnel based on site permanently there for the first time.

No 529 Squadron had been formed from No. 1448 Radar Calibration Flight on 15 June 1943, its main duties being the calibration of the various radar stations, and radar defence equipment for anti-aircraft guns that were situated around the country. For this task No 529 Squadron used the Avro Rota autogiro and the de Havilland Hornet Moth; this was the only Squadron to use the autogiro following the decision in December 1939 that the coastal radar defences needed to be refined and autogiros were felt to be ideally suited to the type of calibration work required. It fell to the Cierva Autogiro Company to resolve the issue and in early 1940 Mr Reginald Brie successfully completed tests using four autogiros.

It could be said that the autogiro had played an important part in the Battle of Britain, for without it the radar that detected the incoming enemy attacks would probably not have been quite so effective. Because of the very secretive nature of its work very little was known at the time about the work that the autogiro was involved in. The autogiros were operated on detachment, and were usually based at the nearest airfield to the radar station. Normally the pilot would be accompanied by an engine fitter and a rigger. The Squadron was used to for calibrating the east and south coast Chain Home (CH) radar stations which formed a link of stations from Scotland down to, and along, the south coast of England.

The calibration of a radar station was not a lengthy task, but sometimes took longer depending on how



favourable the weather conditions were. When a station was due for a calibration check one or two members of No 60 Group were sent to the site and would first make sure that the station was operational. For the actual calibration the autogiro would fly in as tight a circle as possible at a selected point at varying ranges, heights and bearings, allowing accurate radar readings to be taken. These were known as azimuth calibrations. The autogiro was fitted with a transponder in the forward cockpit which the receiving radar aerial could pick up a signal from. The measured bearings could then be averaged and compared with a final, known bearing. Using charts drawn up by a team at No 60 group HQ these reading could be used to ascertain the angles of elevation taken from known heights and range and these then provided the data for the station's Electrical Calculator computer operated by the crew on the ground.

**Editor's Postscript:** More on the development of the autogiro, characters like Reginald Brie and Alan Marsh, and the history of the SH Force, will follow in the next edition.



**Avro Rota I DR624 at Aldenham airfield, Hertfordshire, 6 April 1945.**

**On the left is Air Marshal Sir Roderic Hill, C-in-C Fighter Command. The pilot is believed to be F/L George Ford.**

**(RTR Collection)**





# Javelins of St George

## Profile of an All-Weather Fighter Squadron

Flight Magazine 29 May 1959

For No.33 Squadron, based at Middleton St. George near Darlington and equipped with Gloster Javelin F.A.W.7s, the wheel of history has in a sense come full circle. When the squadron originally formed, in 1916, it was a Home Defence unit with responsibility for defending the North-East region. It operated principally with B.E. 2cs and maintained a number of detachments throughout the area, with the main one at Headley Bar, near Leeds. Now, over forty years on, it is again responsible primarily for the defence of the N.E. region – a parallel which the squadron commander, W/C Norman Poole, has been quick to see. But 'defence' bears a much more scientific connotation when applied to Javelin 7s than when applied to B.E.2cs or even to Spitfires and Hurricanes, Beaufighters and Mosquitoes. Aircraft defending the UK in the First World War had to find their quarry (Zeppelins) visually; in the Second World War they had the assistance of radar, but both day fighters and night fighters relied in the closing stages upon visual interception. Nowadays everything in the RAF is, so to say, much more highly mechanized. This applies not only to aircraft but to their equipment, whether for air-to-air interception or detecting submarines. In the case of an all-weather squadron like No.33, it means that each javelin and crew are virtually independent of the ground. ('All-weather' applies to interception techniques; normal flying is subject to peacetime safety regulations.) Such independence is a desirable end, because information supplied to the aircraft by control may be suspect; and it is an achievable one because of the equipment the Javelin carries.

W/C Poole is in the rare position of being a navigator in command of an fighter squadron, his exceptional experience of interception techniques giving him high qualifications for the post. He served some time with the US Marines Corps and subsequently with American squadrons in Korea, so is well versed in A.I. equipment produced on both sides of the Atlantic. His was the first RAF exchange posting with the US Marine Corps, and for him it renewed old friendships of wartime days when he helped to instruct USN and USMC aircrew who came to this country to learn night-flying techniques. In character, too, W/C Poole seems well suited to command; he has a quiet authority that makes him respected and a dry sense of humour, subtle but not sarcastic. His two flight commanders, S/L DW Smith and S/L DP McCaig, are both pilots.

W/C Poole describes his squadron's prime role as interception, both by day and by night, techniques for this being constantly practised. The Javelin 7s, with their 200-series Armstrong Siddeley Sapphires, are well able to "get up high enough fast enough and far enough out" – the recipe for success in all-weather squadrons. No. 33 was the first squadron to receive this mark of Javelin, from July last year onwards, having been converted by the Fighter Command mobile unit. The aircraft is well liked by the crews; its day-fighter performance is considered superior in many ways to that of the Hunter, while on last year's big defence exercise ('Sunbeam') there was no difficulty in 'swatting' the V-bombers.

In defining his unit's function, W/C Poole stresses mobility as being of equal importance to its defensive capacity. Like the V-bomber squadrons it protects, and the day-fighter units, No.33 has to learn to move around, and operate from foreign soils. Thus recently it went to Germany, and in February-March this year to Cyprus, on the first long-range detachment carried out by Javelin 7s.

When a squadron goes abroad its ground-crew must go too, following after by Beverley or Hastings; and no word of praise W/C Poole could give was too high for the No.33's ground-crews – "The real stars," as he called them, adding that it was a pity that some of the glamour which attaches to aeroplanes and aircrew couldn't be brushed off on to their attendant ground-crew. In the case of No.33, much the same squadron members (continuity of personnel is something to which W/C Poole attaches great importance) have gone on efficiently and smoothly from AW Meteor NF14s to the far more complex servicing problems presented by Javelin 7s.

The mobility of No.33 leads naturally to a word on its history and present location: for as a former unit in the Desert Air Force, the squadron should by tradition be mobile; and its base, Middleton St. George, is perfectly sited as a fighter station could be – on the twin assumptions that a potential enemy will arrive from the East, and his speed and height be such that every minutes and every mile counts towards a successful interception. ('Scrambling' is as much a part of F.A.W. squadron procedures as of the day fighters' and V-bombers'. As W/C Poole puts it, "the scramble is bread and meat to us." Javelin aircrew, however, are somewhat unique; they combine the dash of the fighter

boys with the more calculated enthusiasm of the V-Force crews.)

On its badge, No.33 has a hart's head, commemorating the fact that the squadron (in 1930) became the first to operate with Hawker Harts. It was originally a bomber unit, after its reformation in 1929; but in 1938 its role was changed to that of a fighter squadron when it equipped with Gloster Gladiators. During the early years of the Second World War it operated Hurricanes both in the Western desert and Greece (theatres where mobility, in attack or retreat, was constant); then in the later stages, back in the UK and operating in support of the invasion of Europe, it had Spitfire IXs and subsequently Tempests; this fact is proudly commemorated at the main gate of Middleton St. George, where stands a tempest (acquired with great pertinacity from the M.o.S. establishment at Shoeburyness and refurbished on the station) and a Spitfire.

No.33 Squadron's score during the Second World war was 291 enemy aircraft destroyed in the air, plus ten destroyed and 27 damaged on the ground. After the war it underwent several swift changes: re-equipment with D.H. Hornets at Singapore, and amalgamation with No. 45 Sqn; re-formation in October 1955 at Driffield, when it assumed the all-weather role with D.H. Venom N.F.2s; disbandment at Driffield (January 1957); then a new existence when – on October 1, 1957 - its number was given to No.264 Sqn. This unit, equipped with A.W. Meteor NF.14s, had been an A.W. squadron nearly all its life; it was temporarily detached to Leeming because the runway at Middleton St. George was being serviced. Thus No.33 continued in the all-weather role; and before it left Leeming for its present base received its standard from Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert, its first C.O. (in 1916), at a ceremony attended by 13 former commanding officers – a splendid token of loyalty for 'Thirty-three'.

The squadron now shares the facilities of Middleton St. George with a Hunter F.6 day-fighter unit, No. 92 Sqn. The station, which is commanded by G/C A.V.R. Johnstone and is reckoned to have the smoothest RAF main runway in the country next to Coltishall, dates only from the beginning of the last war. From 1942 to 1945 it housed RCAF bomber squadrons, then for some years had a variegated history before becoming an operational station in No.13 Group of Fighter Command. In November last year Middleton St. George got its badge, appropriately depicting the saint's sword and also a Canada goose, the latter symbol having a dual implication because of the wartime RCAF associations and the old name of the area in which the station stands – Goosepool. Close by the airfield – which when the wind blows from the east suffers from Teesside smog but in other respects forms an ideal base

– runs the Stockton to Darlington railway line, one of the first in the world. It is interesting to speculate what George Stephenson, that pioneer of locomotion, would have thought about Hunters and Javelins.

At the time of Flight's visit to No.33 Sqn., frontal weather conditions were affecting Middleton St. George and the prospects for successful air-to-air (or even ground-to-air) photography looked bleak. Nevertheless the squadron put up a box of four to do take-offs and landings in pairs, and low-level formation runs over the station; and in the afternoon its aircraft were airborne for air-to-air studies (see Flight, May 8, page 637). These formations were led by S/L Smith and in the afternoon he had W/C Poole as navigator. It was a splendid effort considering the weather conditions and the fact that Javelin pilots are more used to working as an individual team, with their navigators, than in formation. The F.A.W. 7s of No. 33 Sqn bear the squadron's markings, horizontal dark blue, light blue and red stripes, across the Javelin's fin. These colours commemorate the squadron's RFC connections, and may be said to symbolize its old function – that of home defence – maintained currently with new techniques and far-reaching defensive equipment.

#### **Editor's Postscript:**

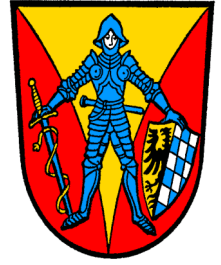
The airfield began its life as Royal Air Force Goosepool, and became RAF Middleton St. George in 1941 when the aerodrome opened under the auspices of Bomber Command. After the war, the aerodrome served various squadrons and units including No. 13 Operational Training Unit (OTU), No. 2 Air Navigation School, No. 4 Flying Training School, and squadrons that used Gloster Meteors, Hawker Hunters, Gloster Javelins and English Electric Lightnings. In 1947, the airfield became a satellite station of RAF Leeming. 33 Squadron was based there between 1958 and 1962, changing from Javelin FAW.7s to FAW 9s in 1960. A total of 142 FAW.7s were built, with 116 being upgraded to FAW.9s.

The RAF left the station in 1964 and the aerodrome reopened as Teesside International Airport in 1966. The airport was renamed Durham Tees Valley Airport in 2004.



# Exercise Dixen Eagle

By Sgt Russ Vickers, A Flt 33 Sqn



Early on a cold January Saturday morning 8 personnel from RAF Benson departed for Bavaria for a week of Nordic skiing. Although some had alpine skied before that wouldn't help much with the little known Nordic.

The journey took us to Stansted then a short flight to Memmingen and a coach trip onto our final stop. As we pulled up in the coach the conditions looked promising for a week of skiing, everywhere you looked was white and fairly heavy snowfall adding to it.

The Exercise takes place in the small German town of Zwiesel located in the South East of the country and close to the border with the Czech Republic. We were accommodated in very comfortable 6 person chalets and with Cash In Lieu Of Rations (CILOR) were pretty much self sufficient. We arrived for the second of the 2 weeks skiing so the Instructor and Staff team were all ready to meet us on arrival.

The first evening was our own with briefs and kitting starting the next morning and skiing the afternoon. Our skis, boots and poles are all hired on site so the only thing people need to bring is clothing, most of which you can borrow from PEd Flight. Layering is preferred because although you can be skiing in cold conditions you quickly get warm due to the physical nature of Nordic skiing.

Everyone was looking forward to getting onto the skis and meeting our instructors and groups who we would be spending the majority of the following week. Sunday afternoon's skiing took place only a couple of hundred metres away from the chalets. As none of us had done it before we were all placed into beginner groups with the end goal of completing the Nordic Foundation 1 Qualification or Bronze award on the German scheme.

Our mixture of British and German instructors were patient with us all as we did our best Bambi impressions whilst trying to pick up the basics. The techniques of the herringbone, double poling, half-snow plough and track changes were practised over and over again as they are the fundamentals of Nordic skiing and being able to do these would stand us in good stead for the rest of the week.

The majority of Nordic skiing takes place in tracks which allows lots of people to be on the *loipe* at the same time and there are miles and miles of these tracks around Bavaria which makes Nordic skiing a useful skill allowing a person to move from town to town and even country to country.

After 4 hours of practice and the students' introduction to the lesser known 'fall on your backside' technique, we called it a day ready to hit some larger routes the next day.

On Monday we travelled about 15 minutes by coach to near the Czech border, and after a morning of practising the fundamentals, we complete a 9km route, which took us to the Czech Border. The weather was still pretty poor at this

point with less than a kilometre's visibility, so although the sights were pretty impressive we're certain there was much more to come. The cold temperatures allowed for the best skiing conditions we would see during the week.

By the end of the second day most people were getting to grips with it and whilst burning a good 4000 calories a day people had no trouble getting to sleep!

Another coach trip on the Tuesday morning took us to a busier public *loipe* where we would spend the rest of the week, all of the groups went their separate ways, and with a maximum visibility of 200 metres we were lucky to see our own groups never mind others! Some even appeared to miss the locals but got to know them very well when their skis met on the tracks; we all very quickly learnt the German translation for 'I'm sorry' ('Es tut mir leid' if you were wondering). These conditions are where teamwork really comes into play, and good communication between team members was really essential for teams to stay together. Longer routes with trickier terrain were conquered by all; we were even introduced to 'carnage corner' where many a person (locals included) would take a tumble; fortunately the only injuries suffered were dented pride and bruised egos.

The Wednesday was used as a bit of a rest day (only 3700 calories burned) due to the plan to reach the summit of the Arber on Thursday, which stands at 1456m tall (over 100m higher than Ben Nevis). The weather improved and the temperature rose above freezing, as a result of which the snow started to melt making going uphill and stopping much more difficult, and presented us all with a new challenge just as we thought we had cracked it.

Each week of the exercise 20 individuals are invited to a small reception in the local town to celebrate the relationship between Zwiesel and the Royal Air Force. This year is the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of that relationship and coupled with RAF100 celebrations a huge event was hosted for all 90 students plus instructors and locals in the perfect location of a cellar of the local brewery for a 3 course meal and a tiny indulgence in the Dampfbier.

All raring to go and not a hangover in sight we all started Thursday off keenly with one thing on our minds, defeating the Arber. This was no easy feat climbing uphill in melting snow with the final climb particularly steep and icy, so much so the chief instructor made the call that particular part was too dangerous for a descent on skis so we made that part of the journey on foot.

The top of the Arber was a sight to behold and was most certainly the highlight for all of the students on their first visit. Although we had been plagued with poor visibility at the start of the week, the weather improved and the skies were as clear as you would see anywhere. From our elevated position we could see into the Czech Republic, the Alps and



all the local towns. The atmosphere was electric with the sense of pride and realisation of what we had achieved. A lunch stop allowed us to take it all in and quickly recharge the batteries before we headed down.

Friday was our final day on the slopes and the day we would all put our speed and stamina into practice with an individual time trial followed by an Interstation relay.

The time trial was a 3km route which took around 20 mins to complete; this was quite a gruelling route and everybody, regardless of ability and fitness levels gave it their best effort. In great tradition the last person over the line received a much larger ovation than the first. After a quick rest it was onto the Team Relay, the mood being slightly more jovial for this one. Benson were the only station to enter 2 teams for this race and although we didn't win, we produced moments of hilarity when crashing into the person in front on the final straight and losing a ski on the final corner. If you can't be good, be funny! After a week of very hard work it seemed a fitting way to end it with a bit of a fun.

That night was our final one and we had an awards ceremony. Schnitzel and chips was the food of choice and helped to curb very healthy appetites after a week of physical exertion. RAF Benson had 1 medal winner for the fastest skier in his group, the rest of team Benson were so proud (jealous) they forced him to wear it all the way back to Benson the following day. Everybody on the Exercise (barring an injury or 2) reached the required standard for their desired test. People collecting their gold award after at least 3 years of hard work were clearly emotional and proud of their achievements. The ceremony wrapped up the whole exercise and was a great way of ending an excellent week.

Over half of the Eagles schemes have been ended due to funding issues however Vixen Eagle is still going strong. Not only does it offer you a week away from work, it is the very definition of Adventurous Training; it pushes you to your physical limits to make you achieve something to be proud of. You build bonds, not only on the loipes but in the chalet where everybody shares the cooking, the washing up and cleaning.

If you ever fancy getting out of work for a week either on your own or as a group I would thoroughly recommend Exercise Vixen Eagle; it will push your boundaries, make you fitter and teach you how to Nordic Ski, all whilst having a great time. A personal contribution of 35 Euros is the entire cost of this exercise and we should all count ourselves lucky to be part of an organisation that offers that. The best way not to lose opportunities like this is to use and take full advantage of them. I hope to return to Zwiesel next year and hopefully I will see you there!





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