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**Royal Air Force Historical Society**

**THE JOURNAL  
OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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## Editorial

The last volume in the Bracknell Second World War series, covering the air war in the Far East, should be with you early in 1996. In March next year there will be a Staff College/RAF Historical Society seminar at Bracknell on 'Air Intelligence in World War Two'. Sadly, this may be the last seminar at Bracknell itself but not, we hope, the last event in conjunction with the College.

One member has volunteered to prepare an index for Proceedings/Journals etc in preparation for the 10th anniversary of the Society's founding next year. It is an onerous task with 15 volumes on the shelf and any other offers of help would be appreciated.

The treasurer wishes to remind all members to complete a Covenant form – it costs you nothing but it is very valuable to the Society. It would also be more than helpful if all members could recruit another member.

It has been suggested that members should commit to paper a brief résumé of their Service careers with highlights. Together with log books and memorabilia these should be earmarked for ultimate transmission to the RAF Museum. We know of cases where widows have consigned their late husband's log books, etc to the bonfire. This means historical documents have disappeared for ever. The Society does not maintain an archive but Hendon does.

Finally, we are keen to know if members have Service photograph collections. There are many gems hidden away in old albums and, in the course of time, some might be used in the Journal. A list of subjects, units, times etc and an idea of quality would be most helpful. Please **do not** send any actual photographs as we do not have the facilities to handle them. Once we know what is available we can always call on you for the loan of some of them at the appropriate time.

Derek Wood

**RAF Museum, 7th November 1994**  
**The Royal Air Force Regiment**

Opening remarks by Symposium Chairman  
Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey

The Royal Air Force Regiment; The Formative Years to 1946  
Air Vice-Marshal D A Pocock

Questions and Discussion

The Royal Air Force's Locally-Raised Ground Forces  
1922-1960 – Group Captain K M Oliver

Questions and Discussion

The Royal Air Force Regiment 1947-1967  
Group Captain M K Batt

The Royal Air Force Regiment 1967 to the Present  
Air Commodore M S Witherow

Overall Questions and Discussion

Chairman's Summary and Conclusions

## CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

AIR MARSHAL SIR FREDERICK SOWREY. On behalf of the Royal Air Force Historical Society, I should like to welcome you most warmly to this Seminar at the Royal Air Force Museum. Sir Michael Knight was due to chair it, but he writes, if I may quote from his letter: 'In wishing you a very successful day I ask you please to pass on my personal regards and regrets for my non-attendance. As things have developed it would have been impossible for me to come in any case, and I am only pleased that I was able to give you sufficient warning. I hope to make amends in some suitable way, perhaps by appearing for the first time in ages at one of the Regiment's social functions next year.'

You do me a great honour in asking me to be your Master of Ceremonies today. This I gladly do, having been associated with the Regiment through the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, having worked with you operationally in Aden, and having been responsible in part, at a later stage of my career, for your training. It is good to have the Commandant-General, Tim Thorne, here today; also we have an Honorary Air Commodore, Sir Michael Beetham.

Today we are going to look at the Regiment in all its facets. We have a talented team of speakers with an important story to tell, namely the contribution that the Regiment has made in war and peace, through men and women who have carried the nickname of 'Rock Apes', a term of endearment, I think, to the remainder of the Air Force, with perhaps a touch of envy for the way in which the Regiment has gone about its business, and for the efficiency, skill and panache with which it has achieved so much.

First, Air Vice-Marshal Don Pocock is going to speak on the Royal Air Force Regiment — the Formative Years.

**THE ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT:  
THE FORMATIVE YEARS TO 1946  
AIR VICE-MARSHAL D A POCOCK**

When Lord Trenchard dined with his officers in the early 1950s he said that the formation of the Royal Air Force Regiment had been a logical extension to his philosophy in the 1920s that, to support light bombers in their policing of large areas in the Middle East, Armoured Car Companies should be formed, manned by RAF officers and airmen and under Royal Air Force control.

Between the wars, with the exception of commitments in the Middle East, there had been little incentive to develop a general defence policy for the RAF as a whole until German re-armament forced an examination of the problem. World War II, however, was the first war in which air power was to play a decisive role. The rear, which historically had always been protected by the front, would be wide open to the enemy's air and deep penetration forces on the ground unless these could be countered on equal terms. And so emerged the classic counter-air war which our enemies were quick to exploit.

In 1933 it had been agreed that the RAF would organise its own defence against low-flying air attacks. Subsequently the Home Defence Committee included airfield defence among its deliberations and another committee began to examine alternatives to the machine-gun for the defence of airfields against air attack. I have not been able to discover what they had in mind at that time. They may have considered the use of balloons, which were too restrictive for airfields, or possibly the parachute and cable system which was introduced for a very short time in 1940; this fired a parachute from which a multitude of thin wires were released, the theory being that the wires would wrap round the attacking aircraft. But no other new system appeared to emerge from their studies, and the machine-gun remained in being into the 1940s.

The Army were reluctant to accept responsibility against the threat of local ground attack on airfields, as they considered that RAF stations should – in common with Army units – undertake their own local defence. The Air Staff were equally reluctant to apply pressure on the Army to provide defence for airfields in case this gave the General Staff the opportunity to exercise influence on the conduct of air operations. In 1937 the Air Council therefore told Commanders-in-Chief that they were to be



responsible for the local defence of their airfields and installations against both low-flying and ground attack. Unfortunately, as ever, there were difficulties in implementing this policy as the rifle had been phased out of RAF service before a decision had been taken on its replacement, and when the emergency periods of 1938 and 1939 arose the RAF had to be armed very much on an ad hoc basis with whatever could be found.

I recall being taken in 1941 to see the Station Armoury at Jurby in the Isle of Man, which was stacked not with rifles but with pikes made out of gas piping. Pikes appeared at a number of other RAF stations. I never was able to discover whether they called in the Honourable Artillery Company to teach us pike drill! However, in 1939 light machine-guns were scaled to reinforce the perimeter defences at RAF stations and rifles were reintroduced on a limited scale. Despite this, the general shortage of weapons at this critical time meant that there were serious deficiencies in the ability of the RAF to defend itself. There was therefore no alternative but to turn to the Army for assistance in both Local Ground Defence and Low Level Air Defence.

The Advanced Air Striking Force which went to France in September 1939 was accompanied by a hastily cobbled force of Lewis guns, to be handled by airmen with the trade of ACH/GD. These were the chaps who used to operate under the direct control of the SWO. Some of them were qualified to be ground gunners and these formed the bulk of the men who went with Lewis guns to France. A few Army anti-aircraft guns were available but the total defences provided little impediment to the Luftwaffe, who destroyed many aircraft on the ground and all too effectively confirmed a Bomber Command prophecy on airfield defence made in 1937, when it said:

‘No works or equipment not provided in Peace and no measures of defence and protection not practised in Peace will be found of any effect in the opening stages of an Emergency, when the need for them will be at its height.’

In the British Isles RAF stations were provided with additional machine-guns – these were mostly Lewis guns mounted on posts – and the Army provided some troops for both ground and anti-aircraft defence. One complication was the fragmentation of command and control, as the RAF’s ground gunners were under RAF control, the Army’s anti-aircraft defences were under one Army commander, and the Army’s ground forces under another.

Moreover, as the threat of airborne or seaborne attack which existed after the Battle of France forced a redeployment of Army units, many RAF stations found that their defences were withdrawn. Yet airfields were if anything more likely to be attacked than before. So the RAF had to develop its own defence organisation as a matter of urgency. Station Commanders were made responsible for the co-ordination of all resources which were available to their stations for local defence and, to assist them, Army officers were provided with the title of 'Local Defence Adviser'.

A joint Army/RAF investigation, undertaken by Air Commodore Saunders who had been Commandant at the Staff College and the Army's Director of Fortifications (which savours of pill-boxes) advised that a single organisation should be provided for airfield defence either by the Army or by the RAF. The compromise upshot was that the Air Ministry agreed how best to form an Airfield Defence Force based upon the 35,000 ground gunners who had by then been recruited, while the Army agreed to strengthen their forces available for airfield defence by raising Young Soldier Battalions. However, by January 1941 the Army was still unable to meet its requirements for airfield defence and it was decided that existing ground gunners and their officers should be formed into Station Defence Squadrons and plans were made for their numbers to be increased to 72,000.

After the Allied evacuation from Greece, some 22,000 Commonwealth and Greek soldiers were moved to the island of Crete, which had assumed great importance to our Middle East strategy. This garrison, coming out of Greece, were tired; they had been fighting hard and had had to leave a lot of their heavy weapons behind. Against them, on the 20th May, the Germans launched an airborne assault supported by waves of *Stukas* and Heinkels. Despite enormous casualties, by sundown they had landed 25,000 men on the island – 10,000 by parachute, 750 by glider, 5,000 by transport aircraft and the balance by sea. On 24th May 1941 the *London Evening Standard* in its Leader said:

'If Hitler takes Crete, one thing alone is certain. The next island to be assaulted is our own. This Empire Day is the gravest and the greatest hour for Britain since Trafalgar.'

The early seizure of airfields on Crete was critical to the German plan. By the second day they had secured the toehold they needed at Maleme, and they were able to fly in reinforcements and supplies. Despite some bitter fighting, the overwhelming weight of the assault and the loss of

Maleme forced the Commonwealth Forces to withdraw from the island.

The scale of the German assault and the speed at which Maleme fell acted as a catalyst on British defence planning and highlighted the need for the co-ordinated defence of airfields. Sir Charles Portal, CAS, wrote: 'The use of airborne troops to attack and destroy aerodromes far behind the land battle is a new development of war and demands new methods of defence.' The loss of Crete is generally accepted as the last straw which led to Churchill's note to the Secretary of State for Air, declaring that 'All Air Force ground personnel at aerodromes have got to undergo sharp, effective and severe military training in the use of their weapons and in all measures necessary for the defence of the aerodromes . . . Every single man must be accounted for in the defence.'

The upshot was that, following on from the earlier joint investigation, a further committee under Sir Findlater Stewart, the Secretary of which was Sir Dermot Boyle, was directed to examine ways of improving airfield defence and to report on inter-Service responsibilities. The Chiefs of Staff accepted its recommendations that the RAF should form its own Aerodrome Defence Corps under the executive control of the Air Ministry. The report stated that the local garrison defence of aerodromes could be achieved more efficiently and with great economy of effort if it were undertaken by the RAF. It was estimated that a force 79,000 strong would release 92,000 soldiers from airfield defence tasks. The statement to Parliament and the submission to the King declared the RAF Regiment to be a Corps formed as an integral part of the Royal Air Force. The Army offered assistance in advice and training and a major-general was loaned to be Commandant of the new Corps.

With emphasis on defence it could be interpreted that this Airfield Defence Corps was to be somewhat downbeat, if not defeatist, in its aims and attitudes. It can scarcely be the most inspiring foundation for a fighting arm of any Service to be so designated. This problem was very much in the minds of the Air Ministry, who were spurred on not only by the Prime Minister's unparalleled and indomitable 'Up and at 'em' philosophy but also by the King's very close interest in the project. So the memorandum placed before King George included, '... Whilst the strategic function of the Corps is inherently defence it is essential that it should be trained to act tactically on the offensive and its title should be one that fosters a fighting spirit and high morale and does not lay emphasis on the defensive role.' The Regiment has never lost sight of that, and I hope that this will be confirmed to you today.

Clearly some expertise was necessary to give the new force a bump start. The Officer Corps was a bit of a mixed bag of RAF officers, some of whom had World War I or Army experience, reserve officers, officers recruited direct from civilian life and airmen commissioned into the new Branch. Some NCOs were loaned from the Brigade of Guards, and the Royal Marines at Deal agreed to run potential NCOs' courses. A Depot was established at Belton Park, Grantham, for the UK, and overseas training schools were established at Amman in Transjordan and at Secunderabad in India.

For the initial batch of officers who lacked previous experience, the Army kindly made an OTU available in the Isle of Man, and when we arrived on the island we found that nearly all the men had gone away to war and left behind some very attractive young ladies. The ladies' attractiveness concerned our Army instructors, who felt that they should cool our ardour by insisting that we spent several hours each day in the prone position on the promenade at Douglas, learning the intricacies of that sophisticated weapon, the Lewis gun. This kept us quiet, along with another activity that the Army revelled in at the time, which was to teach us bicycle drill. The bicycles were great monsters. We had to get on and off them according to Household Cavalry standards, and the saddles on them were more appropriate to pack mules. The Army thought that by these two activities we might be kept quiet in the evenings.

The RAF Regiment at home was initially based on the framework of the original Station Defence Units, and in common with other operational units of the Royal Air Force they were defined as squadrons, independent flights and when necessary as wings, although some purists wished the new Regiment to follow comparable Army titles. The Low Level Air Defence Units were armed with Lewis and Vickers K guns and later Hispano-Suiza cannon, and the Ground Defence Units were identified as Rifle Squadrons, similar to conventional Infantry Companies, although some were later developed as Field Squadrons, to include support weapons and armoured cars.

A justified comment at this stage might be to ask if Germany had created a comparable Airfield Defence Corps, but Germany was on the offensive, and defence was not an acceptable strategy. In fact, to talk about defence in any way was almost treasonable. Hence Hermann Goering's epitaph, 'No enemy bombers shall fly over the Reich.' Hitler's *Luftwaffe* did have a potential ground capability with its own *Panzer* formations, which were known as the *Luftmarine*. But they were not an aerodrome

defence corps as such although they had been used to capture airfields, being much more of a private army for internecine purposes. However, as Germany began to build up its enormous anti-aircraft capability all such defences were part of the *Luftwaffe*, regardless of what was being defended. And this tradition continues today in Federal Germany, where except for immediate self-protection in the Army, all anti-aircraft forces are part of the *Luftwaffe*. The Germans clearly believe that air defence is indivisible

In its early days, the Defence Force, and later the Regiment, did not receive general acceptance. There was a strong view that we were something of a private army, which was not helped by the title Regiment, the wearing of khaki uniforms and the attachment of Army officers. Inevitably Army terminology and habits crept in and training tended to be related to Army situations as opposed to the particular needs of airfield defence. One Army officer submitted a case to the Air Ministry at the time, suggesting that RAF Regiment officers should be issued with walking sticks which would help them (a) to cross ditches, and (b) to point out the enemy to their men. A very sensible air marshal replied, saying that he didn't think the issue of walking sticks would make much contribution to shooting down enemy aircraft!

There was a very strongly held view that the RAF Regiment should be something separate from the Royal Air Force, and the analogy of the Royal Marines was quoted, but one of the fundamental factors governing the formation of the Regiment was that it was to be an integral part of the Royal Air Force, and not something latched on. Only with an intimate knowledge of RAF operations could its capability be exploited, and the closer the Regiment came to air operations the better its ability to defend.

The first operational squadrons of the Regiment were actually formed in the Middle East during the final advance from Alamein, and were part of the Desert Air Force. Aircraft squadrons then in the DAF had received a number of individual ground gunners who had been drafted to them, but these were not formed into organised bodies. When the Desert Air Force got to Castel Benito, in Tripolitania, those ground gunners who had been established by each of the forward fighter squadrons were concentrated into the new RAF Regiment squadrons. Forming the new squadrons in the middle of an advance, away from the Base Supply Organisation in the Canal Zone, was not easy. As an example, there were no authorised scales of equipment, which possibly was not a bad thing. But the desert was a great place for the development of character and self-sufficiency by men who had learned to live with the realities of the desert. This is really a nice

way for me to explain that they were the world's best scroungers!

In a very short space of time the squadrons were equipped and able to take their place in the final advance, which crossed the frontier from Tripolitania into Tunisia. A fast-moving offensive demanded high standards of mobility, and the Regiment units in the desert were active in securing landing-grounds ahead of the flying squadrons. In fact, operations in the Western Desert followed the pattern which had been pioneered by Trenchard's Armoured Car Companies, some of which had moved up from Iraq and Transjordan to operate with the Desert Air Force.

Subsequently, Regiment Units from the UK formed part of the invasion forces which landed at the other end of the desert, in Algiers Bay, for Operation TORCH. These units had been well-trained and equipped to a high standard in the UK and were fully committed to the operations which led to the defeat of the German and Italian forces in North Africa. Because of the rhythm and speed of the advance, the Regiment units frequently found themselves in the Army combat zone in an offensive role, and as a result were the first units to enter Tunis and Bizerta.

After North Africa, Regiment units landed over the beaches of Sicily with the invading force, and occupied the airfields at Catania and Palermo. Fortunately most of the force went in by sea and were not involved in the mess and confusion of the airborne assault on the island. But despite Allied superiority in the air and on the ground it took 39 days to complete the occupation of the island, during which time the Regiment undertook its classical role of securing the airfields and landing grounds.

A squadron landed at Salerno and other units quickly followed across the Straits of Messina to Reggio, Bari and the Foggia Plain, and two squadrons were deployed to defend the radar installations in Sardinia and Corsica. From time to time, as the threat to home airfields decreased, Regiment units were released to supplement the Army in the line, and were engaged in some of the fiercest fighting of the war, for example at Monte Cassino, where they fought alongside the Poles and the New Zealanders, for which a Battle Honour was later awarded.

Later, a Regiment squadron moved to the Dalmatian island of Vis, under the banner of the Balkan Air Force, to take part in what the title of a book described as *A Small War in the Balkans*. As you will all know, there were three factions when Germany invaded Yugoslavia: Mihajlovic, a Royalist who wanted a Serbian dominated Monarchy; Pavelic, who headed the Ustase and who was a fanatical and ruthless enthusiast for the restoration of Croatia; and Tito, the Communist, whose aim was to

establish a Yugoslav Marxist State. Attempts to combine the resources of the Cetniks of Mihajlovic and Tito's Partisans failed, and Churchill decided that we should support the party which was killing most Germans – Tito's.

Vis had been selected as a stronghold in the Adriatic for our amphibious raiding forces and a small airfield had been built on the top of the island, to enable air support to be provided to the partisans. At one stage, Tito and his mistress were flown to the island by the Royal Air Force because the Germans had got very close to his HQ on the Yugoslav mainland. In addition to the defence of the airfield, the Regiment squadrons undertook a variety of tasks in support of our clandestine operations in the Adriatic: with Morgan Giles's Coastal Forces, the Long Range Desert Group and the Special Boat Service. We also had a parachute force of flight strength, trained to support RAF Air Operation Liaison Teams with the partisans.

Following the Armistice with Italy the Allies considered operations in the Aegean. A plan to invade Rhodes had failed, and an alternative operation was launched to secure the island of Cos. The operation, which had been preceded by a Special Boat Squadron reconnaissance, started with a landing by 120 British parachutists, followed by elements of the Durham Light Infantry, some Royal Artillery light anti-aircraft units, who had to wait for several days for their guns to follow by sea, and two squadrons of the RAF Regiment, brought from Palestine and Italy in what was the first air-transported move of the Regiment, but they had their guns with them, which was something. Their task, along with the RA, was to provide light anti-aircraft defence of the island, and there was considerable bombing by Ju 88s with Me 110s in support. Though air defence was provided by aircraft from Cyprus, the airfields were frequently put out of action by the intensive air bombing. Supplies were sparse, as both air and sea transport were limited, and there was also inadequate transport to handle such supplies as did manage to arrive. Finally, after a month the Germans made simultaneous air attacks and seaborne landings, the airfields were quickly over-run and the British garrison overwhelmed. Out of over 200 men from the Regiment, only 17 managed to escape through Turkey.

The Allied landings in Normandy, coupled with the fact that the Russians in their summer campaign were rolling the *Wehrmacht* backwards, caused the German planners to assess that continued embroilment in Greece, Albania and southern Yugoslavia no longer made sense. In the summer of 1944 they withdrew from those areas. And consequent on the German withdrawal from Greece, it was decided that the Allies should act quickly, and intervene against the Communists in the

developing civil war and to save central Athens from incorporation into the Soviet Bloc.

The first British unit to land in the re-occupation of Greece was an RAF Regiment squadron which advanced from the Peloponnese to Patras and surprised the German garrison. This town, the third largest port in Greece, was liberated by the squadron along with a detachment of the Long Range Desert Group. Other squadrons landed shortly after, and due to the somewhat fluid situation tended to operate independently. There was some harassment of the German disengagement by the Greeks, but rival groupings of guerrillas were more interested in repaying old scores and trying to establish the post-war dominance of their particular brand of domestic politics. Three Regiment squadrons, plus a parachutist company of the Iraq Levies, deployed to the airfields at Araxos and Piraeus and when the Greek Communist organisation ELAS started attacks against British forces, squadrons of the RAF Regiment were actively involved with bitter street fighting and defence of the airfield at Hassani. I mentioned that the initial force included a company of the Iraq Levies. These had come up from Habbaniya, had been trained as parachutists, and were expecting to go into Greece by air. When they went in by sea there was nearly a mutiny. Significantly, the company was composed of both Kurds and Assyrians. After they had landed in Greece it was the first occasion since Alexander the Great that Kurds had fought in Europe: something you, as an Historical Society, will appreciate.

The build-up of forces for the invasion of Europe led to a manpower crisis early in 1944 and the Regiment had to accept a reduction in its strength for the forthcoming land battle. The Prime Minister ordered that 2,000 of these first-class men (and those were his words) were to go immediately to the Brigade of Guards, and others to the rest of the Army, mainly to the infantry. All accounts of this switch indicated that the Army were delighted to have such well-trained men. Transfers were largely compulsory, and there was an understandable unwillingness to leave, particularly for those who had actually volunteered to join the Royal Air Force. However, they were assured that as far as possible they would be allotted to their new regiments as parties of friends.

For Operation OVERLORD, the original deployment of Regiment units was to a scale of one Field and one Anti-Aircraft Squadron for each airfield, distributed among the three operating Groups of the Royal Air Force. This scaling was actually increased as further units arrived from the UK. By this time the AA units had been equipped with the Bofors light



anti-aircraft gun and, shortly after D-Day, Armoured Car Flights from the Field Squadrons were concentrated into Armoured Car Squadrons. Some 45 squadrons of the Regiment were involved in the advance through Belgium and Holland.

At home, Hitler's last-ditch strikes against the UK using flying bombs started, followed later by V2 rockets. Regiment AA units formed a major part of the defences in the Diver Belt, and between June and September 1944 a total of 52 squadrons was moved from airfields to South-East England and the Thames Estuary.

In North-West Europe the Regiment's light anti-aircraft gunners were also having their successes. Their big moment came on New Year's Day 1945, when Goering assumed that the Allied aircrew would have had such a tremendous bash-up the night before on New Year's Eve that they would be incapable of flying, and mounted a surprise strike on Allied airfields in Belgium and Holland with between 700 and 800 fighter ground-attack aircraft. Many of these had been dragged in from outposts of the German Empire and were manned by untrained crews. Some 335 sorties were flown against the 11 airfields defended by the Regiment: 50 aircraft attacked Melsbroek alone. The Regiment destroyed 43 enemy aircraft out of 129 destroyed by anti-aircraft fire within the SHAPE area. Goering is reported to have said that this particular day marked the end of the *Luftwaffe*.

The mobility and flexibility of the Regiment squadrons enabled them to proceed quickly in harmony with the forward Army units. One of their tasks was to support Air Technical Intelligence Teams on the heels of the retreating enemy. By March 1945 the units were able to enter Bad Eilsen, later to become and remain the Headquarters of the 2nd Tactical Air Force, seize the Focke Wulf factory and capture the chief designer. As a result of this success, Harry Broadhurst decided that Regiment units should advance quickly to secure *Luftwaffe* installations before they could be destroyed, damaged or looted.

A highly successful operation involving three RAF Regiment Task Forces passed through the Army forward positions and moved up into Schleswig-Holstein, occupying airfields right up to the Danish border and in the islands. In this operation the Regiment seized 15 airfields and received the surrender of over 50,000 troops, a large number of German generals and staff officers. Inevitably in the final stages of the campaign pockets of the enemy put up some exceptionally stiff resistance, a lot of severe actions took place, and we suffered many casualties.

In the Far East the pattern of operations, involving a fanatical enemy

with the ability to survive on the minimum of re-supply, resulted in the battle for airfields and radar installations being more closely linked to the land battle than in other theatres. Forward airfields and strips changed hands frequently, and the front line was often the airfield perimeter.

Within a year from its formation, Regiment units were deployed in the Arakan, to defend airstrips and radar sites from Cox's Bazaar to Imphal. These units were subsequently concentrated on the Imphal Plain. In June 1944 the Japanese broke into the Plain and the threat to airfields was such that aircraft had to be flown out at night, when enemy activity became fiercest and some severe night actions took place

At this juncture in the Campaign it was unfortunate that the reductions being made in the Regiment's manpower to meet Army needs extended to the Far East. The importance of the Regiment units at that time can best be summarised by the signal which the Air Commander, Third Tactical Air Force, John Baldwin, sent to the Air Ministry. In it he said: 'Units of the RAF Regiment have proved themselves of the greatest value in the campaign of which the security of airfields and warning establishments in forward areas has been a feature. When radar stations were established in advance of the front line, within range of the enemy's guns and patrols, it says much for the RAF Regiment that radar crews enjoyed undisturbed conditions in which to carry out their work. It has been quite unsound to rely upon the Army providing troops for local defence in times of crisis, because this is the time when they are invariably withdrawn to take part in the land battle.' Sir John won that particular battle and in fact got some extra reinforcements out of it.

Early in 1945 the 14th Army advanced into northern Burma. Supply was almost entirely by air, and the capture of airfields was vital to the maintenance and speed of operations. The key to the capture of Burma was Meiktila, 50 miles south of Mandalay, and 230 miles north of Rangoon. The airfield there had two all-weather runways which could only be held by the establishment of a very tight defence formed by four defensive boxes. A pattern of operations developed whereby under cover of darkness the Japanese crept back onto the airfield to snipe at and harass the box defences. Each morning, patrols went out to sweep the area and in one of these, whilst leading two of his squadrons in a counter-attack, the Regiment's Wing Commander was killed, and a single flight, under the command of a sergeant, alone killed 20 Japanese. A further example of the extent of operations can be obtained from the fact that one squadron buried 130 of the enemy. The airfield was finally cleared and the road to Rangoon

opened.

The Army's thrust into central Burma was based on rapidly advancing columns with close air support, tactics which depended on utilising forward airfields as the advance progressed, both for fighter and transport operations. Since the advancing columns moved on narrow frontages, large numbers of Japanese troops were by-passed and vital airfields were isolated. So the Regiment squadrons were responsible for securing the Army's lifeline for re-supply and close support, by clearing and holding the airfields as the advance progressed.

The Regiment also participated in the amphibious landings near Rangoon, and on 5th May they occupied Mingaladon Airfield. Large numbers of Japanese forces were now cut off between the Bay of Bengal and the Sittang River, and Regiment units were diverted to join the Army in clearing this rugged area of the enemy.

The plan for the return of British forces to the Malay Peninsula included the RAF Regiment, but the collapse of Japan after Hiroshima and Nagasaki removed the threat of enemy opposition, and Regiment units were landed with other elements of the Occupation Forces over the beaches at Morib. Following occupation of the airfields at Kelanang and Port Swettenham two Regiment squadrons moved on to Kuala Lumpur and others went to Singapore. The road journey to Singapore via Seremban and Johore Bahru was somewhat historic, as it made these squadrons the first British troops to travel the route since the rearguard of the Gordons and Argylls had crossed the Causeway in 1942. Other units landed in Hong Kong and Penang. The Penang units had full responsibility for garrisoning the island and accepting the surrender of many thousands of Japanese. The Hong Kong squadron secured Kai Tak airfield.

But the war was not completely over. With the collapse of the Japanese administration and the rise of various Nationalist factions in the former French and Dutch colonial territories, serious disorders broke out, and because it was likely that Saigon would be over-run by insurgents an urgent request was made for RAF Regiment support to defend the airfield, which lasted until the Japanese had formally surrendered. Likewise, disturbances in the Dutch East Indies resulted in units being sent to Sumatra.

By the end of 1945, 33 Regiment squadrons had served in Air Command, South-East Asia, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park wrote in his despatches, 'If the RAF Regiment in South-East Asia had done nothing more than provide vital protection to our airfields, the record of its achievements would still read with commendable credit. That it was to

perform further additional services and maintain a smartness and discipline which called forth praise from Air, Army and Navy alike demonstrated the value of the Regiment as an adjunct to the Royal Air Force.’

By VJ-Day the Regiment could look back on its short history with pride and a justifiable sense of achievement. Its formation at a difficult time meant that it started life with limited resources and had to struggle for survival against much controversy. But in the space of five years, and in all major theatres, the Regiment had offered the Royal Air Force the continuing freedom to conduct air operations from bases secured by professional and dedicated units under RAF command and control.

The question in 1946 was what was to be the fate of the Regiment. A Committee under the chairmanship of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Barratt concluded that the retention of the Regiment was essential if a balanced force was to be maintained in the post-war era. Fortified by this Report, the Air Council decided that the Regiment should continue as a permanent part of the Royal Air Force.

The Regiment was to comprise 6,000 officers and airmen, 21 squadrons distributed among the United Kingdom, Germany and the Middle East, and additionally was to be responsible for the ground defence training of the Royal Air Force as a whole. That this decision was based on sound military principles was confirmed by Field Marshal Lord Montgomery when, in 1955, he delivered his classic lecture on Organisation for War in Modern Times at the Royal United Services Institute. Despite his theme of centralised control of operations he nevertheless stressed the need ‘for Air Forces to have units of Ground Airmen to defend their own bases.’

## DISCUSSION

### **Sqn Ldr David Nutting**

As an Air Technical Intelligence Officer, may I add a couple of points. The Regiment were active in our support later on in Italy, at about squadron strength, and from Normandy onwards. I would like to commend them, particularly, before they got to Bad Eilsen. A complete squadron was allocated to me, and they went in behind the tanks, surrounded Philips' Eindhoven Works and Research Establishment and sealed it completely, to the extent that they even turned away a major of the Tank Corps and said 'No you can't have radios for the boys'. I was in there that afternoon, and started work on examining that important establishment. Quite an achievement for them, I thought.

### **AVM Pocock**

We had a fairly large operation in support of your teams. The units which had been in Italy and the Balkans moved up to Austria at the end of the war and we supported the Air Disarmament programme. It was a fairly big task and went on for about a year.

### **Frank Card**

Air Marshal Pocock mentioned the German approach to the same problem. Did the Americans have something equivalent to the Regiment?

### **AVM Pocock**

Not at the time. The Americans at the start of the war were mainly concerned with sea bases in the Pacific, but were not operating from land. Later on they took a particular interest in the needs of airfield defence, certainly after Vietnam. Since then we have had an ongoing liaison with them.

### **Wg Cdr Randall-Mannering**

I was transferred from W/Op to be a founding father of the Regiment, and actually commanded the whole of the Regiment in the end, in Burma. I would like to add three points. First we were responsible for receiving the Japanese surrender delegation in Rangoon, and I personally assisted AVM Bouchier in that. Secondly the RAF Regiment formed the first airborne squadron in Burma. I didn't actually train with them, but I formed the unit, getting volunteers, which was no problem at all.

Thirdly, the interesting part of the Burma forward move was that the engineers cut out an airfield using small metal strips in advance of the general operation. The Wing Commander Flying, and I, Wing Commander

i/c Regiment Units, took off in a two-seater aircraft behind the Japanese lines, and did a bumpy ride on this new airfield, which was quite exciting.

### **Graham Hall (ex POW)**

The Germans made the terrific mistake of using the same guns on Tiger tanks as they did for the air defence of the towns, and in my humble opinion the greatest contribution Bomber Command made was in raising the number of *Flak* guns kept for Germany, so the Russian Front did not get these guns for their tanks. Did we make the same mistake?

### **AVM Pocock**

We had no comparable gun system then. The German 88mm gun was both an anti-aircraft weapon and murderous against tanks. It knocked out an awful lot of our tanks in the desert. The Army had a 3.7 inch anti-aircraft gun which could be used in a ground role, but was not a tremendous success. Of course all our Bofors guns had some ground capability, some AP ammunition, but it was very limited.

### **Air Marshal Sowrey**

How much work did the Regiment do with the Airfield Construction Companies? We're talking about a period when airfields could be hewn out of 25 acre fields: you pushed the bank and hedge into the ditch and put down some PSP or Somerfield tracking. I know one of the tasks of the RAF Regiment was to find the sites, to act as the spearhead.

### **AVM Pocock**

There was no planned role. As the advance went on the Airfield Construction people moved in and decided they wanted a strip prepared. The Regiment would often be coming up, and if there was no threat they very frequently turned their hands to helping out and putting down the PSP. There was no authorised role, but it happened often. It did not occur to the same extent in the Desert, where we didn't use much PSP, but certainly in North-West Europe there were many instances where the Regiment laid PSP, all to help the air effort.

### **Cecil James**

I joined my Regiment in May 1941 and found myself posted to a troop of my Battery deployed round Kenley airfield. If memory serves we had half a dozen Bofors 40 mm, and another troop was similarly deployed around Biggin Hill, so the Army at that stage were undertaking a heavier role in the defence of airfields than the Regiment. We were not employed in that way for very much longer – we went mobile, and in autumn 1941

we went overseas. I am not sure when the RAF Regiment, having begun with very light weapons, took over the heavier weapon role, which culminated historically in their being equipped with Rapier. Can you enlighten us?

### **AVM Pocock**

The Regiment acquired Bofors guns in 1943, to replace the Oerlikon cannon. The Bofors had a much better range though not quite the rate of fire. That remained our principal anti-aircraft weapon for many a year until we got the advanced version, the L70, which had double the rate of fire. Division of responsibility is such today that within the area from which a low-flying aircraft can attack an airfield, say for example 5,000 metres up, defence is the responsibility of the Regiment. That really is the split today with Rapier: we have ours to protect Air Force installations and the Army go out with theirs to protect the Field Army. Of course, situations often demand changes to plans, but that is the policy as it stands.

### **Flt Lt Steve Tomkins** (currently RAF Honington)

What, if any, involvement did the Regiment have in the planning for squadrons to go out with Army front-line units to capture the strips which were going to be occupied by the Air Force?

### **AVM Pocock**

It was done at RAF Group Headquarters level. When we went into Schleswig-Holstein, for example, we were under 83 Group (Sir Harry Broadhurst), and the planning would have been done in conjunction with the Army, to ensure that we passed through their lines and went up forward. He had either a full colonel or a brigadier on his staff. Broadhurst was very conscious of the fact that if certain elements got too close to airfields, they would move in and loot, damage aircraft, walk on them, and so on. He felt we should preserve them as intact as possible. There appeared to be no problem in the planning. It all went extremely well.

### **Roy Strickland** (post-war RAF Regiment)

You have correctly emphasised the operational side. At what stage did the Regiment begin ground defence training for the rest of the RAF personnel?

### **AVM Pocock**

That was the policy from early on, from 1940-41. It was jolly difficult then, because very few station and unit commanders found it possible to

make their men available. It was a very bitty arrangement, without a great deal of urge behind it, because everybody was working so hard in getting aeroplanes off the ground.

### **John Davies**

May I take a negative side of the question? In the end the RAF Regiment proved itself. In the beginning didn't it suffer from being seen as a bit too little and too late? Were not too many of those posted to it the refuse of other units? It was not a highly regarded Corps, and when they shot down the CO of a Spitfire squadron in the plain of Catania the reputation was even more severely damaged.

### **AVM Pocock**

They were not the only force to shoot down friendly aircraft in the last war, although that was a particularly sad episode. Yes, there were difficulties at the start – no doubt of that. As I mentioned, we lacked any sort of policy for defensive arrangements. I mean we decided to give up all our rifles and instead issued everybody with carbines and pistols, which were quite useless in any aggressive situation. Of course we were too late – so were lots of other things. We should have had an RAF Regiment round about 1937-38.

### **Air Cdre Probert**

Could I reinforce what the Air Marshal was saying about the value of the Regiment in Burma in 1945, by offering one further quotation which seems to me to make a very important point about the roles of the Regiment. Air Vice-Marshal Vincent, who was commanding 221 Group, working very very closely alongside 14th Army in 1944 and 1945, said, 'I consider it probable that the Group could not have occupied airstrips, as far forward as we did, with consequently better close air support for the Army, had I not been confident that the RAF Regiment could have maintained the necessary security.'

### **Jim Marshall**

You mentioned the Young Soldiers' Battalions formed in about 1941. I served in one of those, and the confusion that existed on the ground may be of some interest, even from a private soldier's point of view. We were armed primarily with rifles, stuffed with grease because we had no bullets for them, and it was of some wonder when we received a Tommy-gun, the one and only for the battalion. We were deployed along the south coast airfields, and I myself was on Shoreham airfield. We were subject to quite



frequent attacks, primarily by Me 109s coming in before first light and streaking out over us, strafing us as they went. For defence against this we had six gun-pits as I remember it, with Vickers twin machine-guns, excellent weapons provided by the Air Force. We had no instruction whatsoever how to load, aim or fire those guns. The only people who really knew how they worked were the Air Force armament people, but they weren't responsible for training us – so they didn't. We did the best we could. There was no kind of early warning, and we had no sort of briefing on where we should not fire, such as at the Air Traffic Control Tower! We did in fact manage to shoot a couple down, but one spectacular incident sticks in my mind. Shoreham was an old civilian airfield, and the NAAFI was in what had been the cafeteria, with a big glass front, looking over the grass airfield. An Me 109 came in during the middle of one morning and dropped a small bomb, which came scooting across the airfield towards us. As an estimate, there were 150 plus in that canteen. There was one back door and they went out through it with no bother whatsoever! What is more, one enterprising gentleman, who was never identified, paused en route to clear the till as he went out!

### **Air Marshal Sowrey**

Perhaps that shows the need for remembering the lessons one has learnt before, and perhaps the professionalism of the present Air Force has learned from occasions such as that! Now Group Captain Kingsley Oliver is going to talk about the locally enlisted ground forces, who in many cases were more Royal Air Force than the Royal Air Force itself.

## **THE ROYAL AIR FORCE'S LOCALLY-RAISED GROUND FORCES 1922-1960**

**Group Captain K M Oliver**

My subject is, in its true sense, historical because none of the ground forces exist today and at least two of them existed before the Royal Air Force. I therefore need to start with the events that took place shortly after the end of the First World War, when there was a dramatic reduction in the budgets for all three Services. It was not long before the Royal Navy and the Army turned on the fledgling Royal Air Force in the hope of achieving its demise and returning to the previous system of traditional Services, each with its own Air Arm. The Air Staff was successful in maintaining the concept of a independent air force for the defence of the United Kingdom but both the Navy and the Army continued to press for control over the air resources allocated in support of maritime and land operations.

In this climate of vested interests, the appearance of British Somaliland on the political agenda in London in 1919 provided Sir Hugh Trenchard with the opportunity to demonstrate a new use for air power. In Somaliland a tribal leader, colloquially known as the 'Mad Mullah', had defied both the Colonial Administration and the British Army since the turn of the century and, during the First World War – when British attention was occupied elsewhere – the Mullah strengthened his hold over more than half of the territory and its inhabitants. When the Cabinet was discussing what might be done in the post-war period to restore British rule in Somaliland, the War Office solution of deploying two infantry divisions for a campaign estimated to last a least twelve months proved financially unpalatable to the politicians. Trenchard's bold proposal to resolve the situation by using a single RAF squadron, supported by the resident army garrison in Somaliland, aroused disbelief in conventional military circles. In fact the Chief of the Imperial General Staff at that time, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, came out with his famous epigram about the Royal Air Force 'coming from God knows where, dropping its bombs on God knows what and going off God knows where.' In point of fact, had he but known it, he provided a very succinct description of Trenchard's concept of the use of air power in colonial policing.

The operation, which used a single bomber squadron deployed from Egypt, the Somaliland Camel Corps of about 500 men, a battalion of the King's African Rifles and a few assorted rag-bags of tribal levies began in January 1920 and, three weeks later, the Mullah's support had disappeared

and he was a refugee in Ethiopia. What became known as ‘the cheapest war in history’ had achieved its aim in a very short period of time at minimal cost in casualties and, in financial terms, at a cost of £77,000.

Three months later a major insurrection broke out in Iraq and Trenchard ensured that the RAF squadrons which were deployed with the Army reinforcements which were rushed to Mesopotamia were employed in that campaign. When Iraq had been pacified, attention turned to ways of maintaining the peace there at rather less cost than that of the 80 battalions which had been used to secure it. Once again, Trenchard saw the opportunity and took it. He gave an undertaking to control Iraq, Transjordan and Kuwait with a force of eight squadrons of aircraft, supported by small ground forces under RAF command, and this offer was of course gratefully accepted by a cash-strapped government in 1921. It is interesting to note that, included under RAF command in Iraq were some armoured trains and river gunboats, but I don’t think the RAF Regiment’s forebears were involved in either of those activities. The Army of course steadfastly refused to hand over similar responsibilities for the Northwest Frontier of India because it was considered to be far too important in terms of Army training and the Army’s attachment to the great game which was played out on the frontier was such that they couldn’t have the RAF coming in and spoiling it!

The problem which faced the Air Staff in coming to terms with the RAF’s new commitments for air control was that, while aircraft shared many of the desirable and traditional roles of the cavalry, they also suffered from the same major disadvantage as mounted troops –they could not occupy and hold the ground which had been taken from the enemy. Therefore if air control was to be made to work, the RAF had to have its own ground forces to exploit the successes achieved by its aircraft. It was, in fact, a mirror image of the argument advanced by the Army for having aircraft under Army control but in this case the balance was tipped in favour of the Air Force which offered the cheaper solution.

I will deal firstly with Iraq from 1922 to 1955. The transfer of responsibility for the internal security and external defence of the post-war mandated territories of Iraq, Transjordan and Kuwait to the RAF was a recognition of the independent role of the new Service. Whether the success of the Rolls-Royce armoured cars used in the Palestine campaign in the 1914-18 war came to mind, or whether it was simply because they were available in the Middle East is not recorded, but in 1921 the RAF took the decision to form two armoured car companies, manned by RAF officers

and airmen, to support air operations in Iraq and Transjordan. Four further companies were subsequently added to this Order of Battle and the RAF's armoured cars played a considerable part in stabilising the volatile situation in these territories between the wars, as well as in operations in the Western Desert between 1940 and 1943. However, it is not my task to talk about the armoured car companies in any detail either before, during, or after the last war when they became part of the RAF Regiment in 1946. When the first aircraft were deployed in Iraq there was already a military presence in the area – the Iraq Levies, a locally-raised force under British Army command. As such, it comprised cavalry, infantry and artillery and was almost 5,000 strong. This was not the sort of ground force which the RAF required for its own purposes and it was speedily reduced in size and reorganised into two infantry battalions, under a small force headquarters, with a total strength of less than 1,800 men. Unlike the armoured car companies, the Air Staff decided against the use of any RAF personnel in the Levies, which continued to be officered by seconded British Army officers.

The Iraqi population was divided into Arabs and Kurds, who were both Muslim, and Assyrians who were largely Christian. For a variety of reasons, the RAF Levies were drawn initially almost entirely from the Assyrian population, but by 1933 it had become politically necessary to recruit Arabs and Kurds as well. In many ways this improved the acceptability of the Levy force to the local population – particularly in those areas in which they were deployed in support of air operations.

The outbreak of war, and the Rashid Ali revolt in support of the Axis powers in 1941, saw the Levies in action at Habbaniya and Falujah and this led to a decision to expand the force to some 11,000 men. In 1943, the re-titled 'Royal Air Force Levies (Iraq)' had over 50 companies deployed throughout the Middle East. Although this enabled some 5,000 RAF Regiment personnel to be replaced in the theatre, the Levies by then had lost the original role for which they had been raised – the RAF was now engaged in a different type of war and a threat did not exist to the bases in Iraq. Equally, the Levies themselves were carrying out Army tasks in securing the lines of communication to Persia and Russia – and even in military operations in the Eastern Mediterranean where, as you have heard, the Parachute Company of the Iraq Levies was deployed in action against the Germans.

The post-war reorganisation of the RAF Levies (Iraq) envisaged a force of eight squadrons officered by the RAF Regiment but events were moving against a continuing British presence in Iraq and the withdrawal of British

Forces overall in 1955 saw the final parade of the Levies at RAF Habbaniya on 2nd May.

We now turn to the Aden Protectorate where the success and economy of the doctrine of air control in Iraq led to its extension to the British Colony and Protectorate of Aden in 1928. Unlike Iraq there was no local military force in Aden, which had been garrisoned by the Indian Army. Accordingly, the RAF revived the locally enlisted force known as the Yemen Light Infantry which had been disbanded only three years previously. Building on the expertise that was available, the Aden Protectorate Levies were raised by the RAF in 1928 with an establishment of two British Army officers, six platoons of Arab tribesmen, 20 camels and 40 mules – even in those days the Treasury was quite precise in what you could and could not have! It was realised, however, that this small force would require some additional capability when deployed in the Protectorate and a section of RAF armoured cars was detached from Baghdad to Aden where it became ‘D77’ Flight of the resident flying squadron, which was of course to those who served in Aden the legendary No 8 Squadron.

Peace in the Protectorate was maintained effectively and economically by aircraft supported, when necessary, by the small ground forces under RAF control, and with the outbreak of war in 1939 the Aden Protectorate Levies was expanded tenfold and deployed throughout the Middle East from Somaliland to the Trucial Oman. The post-war reorganisation recognised the importance of the Levies to RAF commitments in the area and the size of the force was again set at some 17,800 all ranks – roughly equivalent to the post-war strength of the RAF Levies (Iraq). As in Iraq, the intention was to replace the seconded army officers with RAF Regiment officers.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of air control in the Aden Protectorate did not survive for long in the post-war period. The many reasons for this included the political and economic changes within the Colony and the growth of nationalism among the tribes in the Protectorate. The most obvious form of this threat was the one posed by the Government of the Yemen which was determined to threaten the borders of the Protectorate with the aim of expanding its influence southwards; and one of the ways in which it did this was to support every anti-British faction within the Protectorate and the Colony. The collapse of the policy of air control left the Aden Protectorate Levies with the task of conducting large scale operations against well organised ground forces – a role for which it was

neither organised nor equipped. Some efforts were made to redress the balance by deploying RAF Regiment squadrons and strengthening the resident armoured car unit, but the Air Staff soon came to realise that it was not in the business of duplicating the Army's role at the RAF's expense. In 1957 the Army began to take over the Aden Protectorate Levies with the aim of creating a field force of at least four infantry battalions, with supporting arms and services, in order to form the nucleus of a future South Arabian army.

We move next from the Middle East to the Far East where the post-war deployment of RAF squadrons in Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong raised the question of ground and low-level air defence for airfields and RAF installations in that theatre. The reduction in the global establishment of the RAF Regiment, and the costs of stationing UK-based personnel in the Far East Air Force, led to the decision to meet this requirement by the use of locally enlisted forces and the RAF Regiment (Malaya) was accordingly raised in 1947. By 1952 a wing of five squadrons was in being, with one squadron based in Hong Kong, one in Malaya, and three – together with the wing headquarters – on Singapore Island. A sixth squadron was raised in 1955 and subsequently three of the squadrons were converted to the low level air defence role, equipped with the Bofors L40/70 gun. The interesting point here is that the RAF's two earlier locally-enlisted forces were raised to fulfil the particular requirements occasioned by the inter-war colonial doctrine of air control; the third locally-enlisted force was specifically established to fulfil the by now well recognised requirement for airfield defence and it was therefore organised and equipped along the same lines as normal RAF Regiment units.

However, the conventional threat to RAF airfields did not develop during the lifetime of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) and it was not until after the Force had been disbanded, and the majority of its personnel transferred to the army and Air Force of the newly-independent Malaysia, that confrontation with Indonesia required the deployment of RAF Regiment field and low level air defence squadrons to Far East Air Force from the Middle East and the United Kingdom.

So the prime task of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) during its brief life was to undertake counter-terrorist operations in the Malayan jungle, which it did with increasing expertise over a 12 year period. Unlike British units, which carried out a single operational tour of two or two and a half years, the Malay officers and airmen of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) were on a continual circuit of operations throughout their service, and they therefore

developed an expertise which was probably only rivalled by the Royal Malay Regiment and detached Gurkha units. Again, unlike the two Levy forces in the Middle East, the officers and airmen of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) were commissioned or enlisted on comparable terms to their British equivalents and English was the everyday language of the RAF Regiment (Malaya). As junior officers and senior NCOs were sent to the UK on training courses few concessions were made to any English language difficulties at that level. Nevertheless, as in all the RAF's locally-raised forces, British officers and NCOs serving with them were expected to be able to speak the local language within a short while of their arrival.

In summary the RAF's locally-raised forces had – even by RAF standards – comparatively short lives and this was because the circumstances which they had been formed to meet either disappeared or changed, leaving them as hostages to fortune. But it would be wrong to dismiss as failures the ideas which gave rise to their existence, and the implementation of these ideas.

In Iraq the Levies had contributed towards the acceptance of the policy of air control as a viable alternative to the maintenance of large Army garrisons in unattractive colonial surroundings. They proved their worth in conventional airfield defence at the siege of Habbaniya but the existence of the Levies after the war added to the problems of the already complex Anglo-Iraqi negotiations about sovereignty. The extension of air control to the Aden Protectorate was the result of the success of the Iraq experiment, and again the role of the Aden Levies provided the contribution which completed the equation. However, when air control gave way to conventional internal security operations, the size and structure of those ground forces proved incapable of dealing with the change in the threat.

The introduction of a locally-raised force established, equipped and trained on conventional RAF Regiment lines in the Far East in 1947 was a bold and imaginative move. It was also a cost-effective solution which was quite capable of meeting the requirement; indeed, had the RAF Regiment (Malaya) still existed during the period of Confrontation with Indonesia, it could have carried out the roles of low-level air defence and ground defence of airfields in Singapore and Malaya, and the helicopter support role in Borneo even more effectively than the re-deployed RAF Regiment squadrons were able to do because of their continuing problems of personnel turbulence and undermanning. Unfortunately, as we know, politics intervened to prevent this ideal solution from taking place.

Nevertheless, these three locally-raised forces made significant

contributions to the Royal Air Force's Order of Battle from 1922 to 1960 and their place in Royal Air Force history is secure. Perhaps I am not being too fanciful in seeing Trenchard's hand in creating ground forces under RAF control as another example of his far-sightedness in recognising the eventual need for the existence of a force such as the RAF Regiment.



## QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

### **Air Cdre Foale**

Why was the policy of air control stopped in the Aden Protectorate? Many of us saw a year or two ago a television programme which I think was called 'Death from the Air'. It went superficially through the air control period in Iraq and the general tone of it was anti-air power; I wonder how far the sort of feeling that resulted in that programme affected the policy change in Aden.

### **Gp Capt Oliver**

I think the programme that you saw was a product of post-war political correctness and it certainly had no influence or bearing on the reason for the demise of air control. What was not clearly understood was that the RAF operated, particularly in Aden, a policy known as the 'inverted blockade', in that the tribesmen were given adequate time to leave their village and take to the hills; only when the local political officer had confirmed that the village was abandoned was it bombed and destroyed, and they were then left to come back and rebuild. It was an eminently bloodless form of control, but of course this sort of factual detail is not of prime interest to those who wish make television programmes or commercials which are seen by a lot of people.

### **Air Cdre Foale**

The television programme was neither here nor there, but what was it that stopped a well tried method from being exercised in Aden to the point that the control could no longer be maintained?

### **Sir Frederick Sowrey**

I think air control served its purpose; my father commanded 8 Squadron, in an out-of-town or up-country environment in which you could identify and isolate individual tribes in individual areas. In Aden, however, a nationalist force was brought into an urban situation – where your requirements for intelligence on the streets is not photographic from the air; your requirements for action on the streets and security on the petrol stations, on the airfields and in the cafes, was not something which could be met by air control. Air control continued, let's face it, in many areas – in the use of Hunters under Sir Michael Beetham from Khormaksar, in the transport force, in reconnaissance units, in the rotary wing forces. In effect the Air Force and the Army were each playing a part in air control, but it

was not pure air control in the way that Trenchard envisaged it in Somaliland and subsequently Iraq.

### **Cecil James**

There is an irony in the situation that we are now talking about in that when the Chiefs of Staff were reaching the point of a change of policy in respect of Aden, the Secretary of State for Air, Bill de l'Isle who was a distinguished soldier, was very much opposed to that change. What you have just said, Freddie, is perfectly true but it is also the case that an element, an important element in the decision – how important it was I would not like to say – was a change in the climate of public opinion; you could get away with air control before the war but now it was much more difficult. A lot of things had contributed to that change in the public mood, the bomber offensive and the destruction caused related to a totally different situation from that in Aden. It led to criticisms being made – albeit for entirely the wrong sort of reason – and politicians were receptive to public opinion. Nevertheless that particular Secretary of State did feel that a change of policy could see soldiers soaked up in the sands of Aden, the sort of thing that the original policy of air control was intended to avoid, and he opposed it and it led to another curious incident, I think one of the more embarrassing moments in my own Civil Service career. The Chiefs of Staff were due to meet and the previous day the Secretary of State, worried about the decision that they might take, asked me to do a minute expressing his own misgivings which I duly did – praise the Lord it was a Private Secretary minute and not a Secretary of State minute – and I despatched it to the Vice-Chief of the Air Staff who was one John Baker, one of the craggier Air Marshals. I found myself summoned to his office the following day, just before the Chiefs were due to meet, and instructed to withdraw the minute on the grounds that political influence was being brought to bear on the Chiefs of Staff, prejudicing their position as being responsible for giving objective professional advice to the government of the day. With that bit of background it can be seen that various things were involved and it was not quite a black and white situation as Bill de L'Isle tended to think it was. But then Bill de L'Isle had sat at Trenchard's feet as a soldier, learnt about air power and become rather more light blue in some respects than even the Air Staff. He himself had been to the Middle East in 1952 and I was with him. He was most impressed by both the Aden Levies and the Iraq Levies.

Jim Marshall

I'm back again but now I've progressed from a young soldiers' battalion private to a Squadron Commander in the Aden Protectorate Levies. Six of us went out in 1954 to take over the six existing squadrons; what was done with those six squadrons is worthy of comment. We were reduced really, in the active area, to four effective squadrons because of tribal connotations. We had to run a series of convoys to maintain the government guard forts in the Protectorate. One notorious fort was down the Wadi Atif; quite frankly we stayed alive by courtesy of 8 Squadron and I cannot speak too highly of the air co-operation given by that squadron in those very difficult days. In one particular incident in which I was involved we had to rush an ambush and were very, very heavily fired on. I can see to this day the two Venoms coming up with their wings shaking and one going roaring up the mountainside taking out the brush behind it with its wash – that was airmanship and backup *par excellence* by anybody's standards. By the same token, the Levy squadrons themselves took a fearful beating, and what brought it to a head was when 6 Squadron under Jock Stewart was massacred and Wing Commander Marshall killed. Subsequent to that the fort was closed, but to close it we went in with a force under Wing Commander Terrett comprising five squadrons of Levy, one battalion of Seaforth Highlanders, a detachment of the Blues with armoured cars, a detachment of Royal Engineers and the full support of three Lincolns which dropped 36,000 pounds of bombs on the other side before we started and that I think is probably as big an active force as was commanded by a Regiment Wing Commander in the history of the Regiment. I may be wrong, but it was certainly a very powerful outfit. Let me say again, the battle fought by those squadrons was perhaps misplaced, but there was a great deal of bravery, because we could not, or we had not, the force actually to attack the other side. I personally found it extremely unpleasant because I had a price on my head and on the run into Atif it was evident that there was a sniper in one place bent on securing that price, because wherever I went his bullets followed me, and nobody else. Believe you me, that is a highly unpleasant experience.

### **Sqn Ldr Tony Galloway**

I always thought that the armoured car squadrons were the forerunner of the RAF Regiment, but from what I have heard today there seems to be a five year gap before the armoured car squadrons were absorbed into the RAF Regiment. Why was that?

## **AVM Pocock**

The armoured car companies of the Royal Air Force were manned by a very exclusive brand of Royal Air Force officer and there are lots of stories going around as to how these chaps managed to get posted to the armoured car companies – suggestions that they had failed their flying training and so on. They were quite a powerful and autonomous body and managed to keep themselves entirely separate, although we frequently worked together, until a decision was made in about 1946. The fact that they were separate was in no way uneconomic; it didn't prejudice support and co-operation and we worked quite harmoniously with them in the desert. They were a distinct body of officers in those armoured car companies and their freemasonry continues today.

## **Philip Saxon**

On an historical point, am I not right that the first air service to develop an armoured car company was the Royal Naval Air Service in Dunkirk in the very early part of the First World War under a very intrepid commander? Did the later development of our armoured cars learn anything from that?

## **AVM Pocock**

You are absolutely right; it was when no role was found for the armoured cars in France that they were redeployed to the Middle East. I touched on this by saying that it may have been the Rolls-Royce armoured cars which were left over in the Middle East at the end of the First World War which provided the impetus for the formation of the armoured car companies there. I also want to touch on the point raised by Jimmy Marshall and echo his praise for 8 Squadron. I recall coming down a wadi in not very attractive circumstances and the only casualties caused to my men were from the hot 30 mm cases which fell amongst us as the Hunters of 8 Squadron flew over our heads firing up into the hills to keep the enemy fire away from us. When you have that sort of support you make sure that when you get to Khormaksar the first people you go and buy a drink for are the pilots of 8 Squadron.

## **Gp Capt Philip Gibson**

I would like to make a point about the RAF Regiment (Malaya). I believe that those squadrons – for those who commanded them or the British elements that had anything to do with them – were the easiest and the most pleasant of units to command and I think it is important to point out to all three of the Levy units the debt that we owe to them, particularly

for the loyalty that they gave. This leads on to my question: what was the individual status of the indigenous officers, in other words, whose commission did they hold and what was the highest rank reached in each of the three forces before they were either disbanded or transferred to another organisation?

### **Gp Capt Kingsley Oliver**

I am not clear on the status of the indigenous populations in Iraq and Aden other than to say that they were probably British Protected Persons who were entitled to some sort of second class British passport. In the RAF Regiment (Malaya) there was a much more clearly defined relationship in terms of the Commonwealth. Certainly the RAF Regiment (Malaya) officers held the Queen's Commission and their NCOs ranked with RAF NCOs in terms of precedence and using the appropriate Sergeants' and Corporals' messes. The highest ranks were local lieutenant-colonels, I suppose or their equivalent in the Iraq Levies or the Aden Levies. The RAF Regiment (Malaya) officers who went into their own national forces did extremely well. There was certainly an air commodore in the Malaysian Air Force and several colonels – so I think the training they received at the hands of the Royal Air Force was amply justified by the results they achieved afterwards.

### **Air Cdre Mickey Witherow**

I was in the Aden Protectorate Levies for a little while and can continue the answer to that question. The Arab officers out in Aden were in fact Governor's Commissioned and they had up to the equivalent of one full colonel and two or three lieutenant-colonels. In each wing/battalion there was a three-pip man who was the senior Arab officer, there was one Arab officer of two-pip rank in each squadron/company, and in each platoon/flight there was a one-pip officer. In order of status came first the Queens Commissioned officers, ie us, the Governor's Commissioned officers came next, then British senior NCOs, and after that the Arab NCOs. That was the picture in the Aden Protectorate Levies and this continued into the Army Aden Protectorate Levies, which became the Federal Army, until full commissions were granted to them locally.

### **Sqn Ldr Nick Tucker**

I am currently the Director of the RAF Regiment Museum at Honington. You may be interested to know that we provide an officer on service in Northern Iraq with the forces out there. Of those who have served to date, each of them have come back and said that they have met locals who have

served in the Iraq Levies or have knowledge or association with the armoured car companies, although with the latter they haven't said from which end of the gun, and they speak with great pride and affection of the association with our previous forces.

**Richard Bateson:**

Returning to the name of the Corps, as I understand it the change from Royal Air Force Aerodrome Defence Corps to that of Royal Air Force Regiment was made at the suggestion of Air Commodore A P M Sanders who was Director of Ground defence at the end of 1941. What influence did he, and also the first Commandant, Major-General Claude Lyardet, who was the Inspector of Aerodrome Defence at the War Office at the time, have on the beginnings of the RAF Regiment?

**AVM Pocock**

The Aerodrome Defence Corps was just a body of men without a title, as there was no title prior to the Royal Air Force Regiment. They were squadrons which had been formed on stations and were directly linked to them, so they had no administrative overheads at all. They were collectively an aerodrome defence corps but were not known as such. Sanders was the Commandant of the Staff College before becoming our first Director of Ground Defence. Claude Lyardet was a Territorial Divisional Commander who the Army lent to us to be our first Commandant – later on his title was changed to Commandant General. He had quite an influence and was a powerful man in the City of London. He did a lot of good in the early days for the Regiment, there is no doubt about that.

**Air Marshal Sowrey**

This coverage of the nostalgic remembrances of those who served with the locally enlisted forces brings out one of the great strokes of genius which exist in the British armed forces for working with those of other nations under command. Our ability to enthuse them and produce from them a degree of admiration and affection – even though the passage of time has now meant that we no longer have them – is perhaps one of the stirring chapters in the history of the British Armed Forces and none of course more than the RAF Regiment.

We now come to the post-war period, and first Group Captain Mike Batt is going to speak about the period from 1947 to 1967.

## **THE ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT (1947 TO 1967)**

### **Group Captain M K Batt**

It was reasonable to suppose that the end of the Second World War would provide the world with a period of stability and the opportunity to re-build the fabric of life where it had been shattered economically, socially and politically in so many countries.

Post-war retrenchment and reform inevitably affected His Majesty's Forces which were still deployed in considerable strength worldwide, but we have heard that the Royal Air Force Regiment's position and roles in the post-war order of battle and those of its associated overseas forces were reaffirmed shortly after the cessation of hostilities. This milestone received royal endorsement in September 1947 when His Majesty King George VI graciously accepted the appointment of Air Commodore-in-Chief of the Royal Air Force Regiment and later announced his intention of awarding a King's Colour to the corps. These events provided the firm base for rationalising the Regiment's strengths and disposition of front-line units.

With the incorporation into the RAF Regiment of No 1 and No 2 Armoured Car Companies, and the Independent Armoured Car Flight in Aden, a revised ORBAT saw four Wing HQs, 10 rifle and two Armoured Car Squadrons in Germany as part of the British Air Forces of Occupation, two Wing HQs, six Rifle and two Armoured Car Squadrons in the Middle East and one (LAA) Squadron in the United Kingdom. If this reflected the threat assessment, the next upheaval was more in the style of self-inflicted injuries than change in response to operational requirements.

In 1947, Regiment wings and squadrons were renumbered in a new sequence which mirrored the flying squadron number plates; no longer did squadrons carry distinctive four-figure numbers in the 2000-series with wing HQs identified by 1000-series numbers. Thereafter, without a descriptive suffix, confusion could be commonplace. This administrative adjustment should not go unrecorded because little or no heed was paid to seniority when the new number plates were allocated. Although subsequent painstaking research established a definitive record of relative seniorities for the award of the standard, parade and other purposes, it is still something of a numerical anomaly that, for instance, No 63 Squadron RAF Regiment, formerly 2865 Squadron) is by reason of continuity the most senior RAF Regiment squadron after Nos 1 and 2 Squadrons with their armoured car company heritage of many years' standing.

The new numbering policy was not imposed in 1947 when 12 squadrons

of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment were raised and located at fighter stations alongside squadrons of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. Reflecting the threat from air attack at this time, all these units were equipped with the hand-operated 40mm Bofors gun and were dispersed throughout the United Kingdom from Aldergrove to Biggin Hill. Their creation marked the first territorial connections associated with the Regiment, a development which was underlined by county names alongside their four-figure number plates. They quickly built-up admirable community loyalties which were shared by local citizens as well as locally recruited officers and gunners. The county spirit was well founded and was to surface again 22 years later when the Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment was reconstituted, the original 12 squadrons having been disbanded in 1957 at a time when it was considered to be too expensive to re-equip the auxiliary flying squadrons with more modern aircraft.

The delicate and short-lived post-war indulgence in international relations was soon to be affected by a combination of circumstances which, as befitted the RAF's second and only other combat arm, impacted heavily upon its Regiment, which by the late '40s was fairly well bedded-in to the peacetime establishment. The North Atlantic Treaty, Allied determination to relieve the siege of Berlin and the climate of tension exacerbated by the Korean War combined to produce fresh demands upon the Services. In the second half of 1951 eight new LAA squadrons were raised in Britain and deployed to the 2nd Tactical Air Force in Germany, to be followed by another eight together with six newly-formed wing HQs to command and control them.

Leaving aside South-East Asia and the protracted campaign to counter the communist terrorist offensive in Malaya which necessitated the creation of the RAF Regiment (Malaya), the situation in the Middle East, albeit for different reasons than in Germany, required more effort in terms of securing air force assets. By 1952, the force level had risen to 14 squadrons and six wing HQs in the Canal Zone and elsewhere. Seven squadrons had been fully occupied until the last days of the British mandate in Palestine and there began, chiefly in the old city of Jerusalem, the Regiment's involvement in internal security operations, a role which was to play a dominant part in the life and times of the corps for in excess of 40 years. Indeed, more than doubling the force in the Middle East did not alleviate excessive pressures on units that had to be rotated in the early '50s to meet commitments in Aden, the Canal Zone and later in Kenya at the time of the Mau Mau revolt – the start of an overstretch situation which was to get



much worse before it got better.

Had the advent of an innovative project which began at Upavon in 1948 not been so short lived, it is possible that the post-war Regiment would have been in a better position to respond quickly to the unexpected without constantly tasking a limited selection of units and personnel that increasingly had to fulfil emergency detachments in quick succession. The Upavon scheme created No 2 Wing consisting of a home-based strategic reserve of two air portable LAA squadrons and a parachute trained rifle squadron – long before the concept of the British Army’s spearhead battalion was developed. However, the wing’s first and only operational task was a precursor for future joint operations with the United States Air Force in this country, for it required the Regiment to deploy at short notice to Mildenhall, Lakenheath and Sculthorpe to secure the airfields for the arrival of American strategic bombers in East Anglia. The wing was disbanded in March 1951. However, the idea was revived in 1958 with the regrouping of Nos 16 and 48 Squadrons into No 33 Wing based at Felixstowe.

The early post-war shape and size of the Regiment necessitated inevitable adjustments in the infrastructure of training support, the most notable of which occurred in August 1946, and saw the depot move from its wartime home at Belton Park near Grantham to Catterick, quite simply because the Army ranges and training areas at Catterick were some of the best and at that time the least over-utilised facilities in the United Kingdom. Without easy access to well equipped and extensive tactical training grounds, it is not possible to properly train officers, NCOs and gunners all of whom were from the outset, and still are, trained in fundamental infantry skills before and in between acquiring additional specialist skills associated with ground-to-air weapons and other particular roles.

The end of 1952 provides a convenient reference point for looking back at the immediate post-war years. In terms of force levels, it is interesting to recall that the agreed peacetime ceiling of 21 squadrons and 5,800 officers and men had, by then, more than doubled to 47 regular squadrons excluding the associated overseas forces. It is important to note that, although a tally of combat units provides a simple yardstick for indicating fluctuating threats and commitments, it is not the only barometer for measuring the disposition and value of the corps to the Royal Air Force. A high proportion of Regiment personnel has always been deployed throughout Air Force establishments and joint-Service units in digital posts and small groups chiefly employed in weapon training, teaching selected

tactical skills and nuclear, biological and chemical countermeasures. An acknowledged expertise in radiation health control and decontamination enabled Regiment officers and NCOs to be the first servicemen to enter the target areas after the British atomic tests in Australia.

For all the reasons that visible symbols of loyalty and patriotism encourage steadiness on the battlefield, and not least to acknowledge the achievements of the first generation of RAF Regiment officers and airmen, the presentation of the Colour was regarded, naturally, as an event of very special significance. On 17 March 1953 Her Majesty the Queen, as Air Commodore-in-Chief, presented her Colour to a representative detachment of the Regiment in the ballroom of Buckingham Palace. Unlike other RAF Colours whose movements are confined to a particular area or theatre, with authority from the Commandant-General, the Regiment Colour was enabled to see service wherever the corps served. When it is not being paraded, the Queen's Colour is kept in the custody of the Commandant of the RAF Regiment Depot, and today, the third Queen's Colour is so safeguarded at Honington. It is the third silk because despite stringent care and attention, the Colour is shown frequently in association with the corps' reputation, not hitherto mentioned, for seldom missing an opportunity for parade and ceremonial work. Indeed, since the Regiment's founding fathers and mentors recognised, from the outset, the importance of drill as a valuable aid to discipline and in encouraging corporate pride, it was perhaps not surprising that, in the early '50s at Catterick, the depot demonstration flight extended its horizons beyond tactical support for courses and pioneered the art of continuity drill for display purposes, ably supported by the band.

Since flexibility and economy of effort had already earned the Regiment a reputation for cost-effectiveness, the ability to react quickly to the unexpected was again tested successfully in 1953. No 33 Wing and its squadrons, through strenuous rescue and sand bagging operations, minimised the loss of civilian life which resulted from the East Coast floods, and particularly at Canvey Island they saved the town from being totally obliterated by the North Sea. Further afield, dissident tribesmen in South Arabia, the insurgents in Malaya and troublemakers in the Canal Zone continued to demand considerable attention, but internal affairs also had a significant influence in the short and longer term. Rifle squadrons were all converted to field squadrons by equipped them with 3" mortars, seven three tonners, 17 trailers and 28 Landrovers down to sub-section level, increasing their scales of radio equipment and almost doubling the

number of light machine-guns to provide better mobility, flexibility and firepower thus enabling a relatively small number of men (a field squadron was established for 162 all ranks and trades) to operate effectively over larger areas of ground. The success of the field squadron concept led to the 12 Auxiliary LAA squadrons being converted to the field role instead of re-equipping them with the more powerful and complex L70 Bofors which, throughout the regular squadrons, replaced the earlier mark used by the Regiment since 1943.

By the end of 1955 the Regiment had been reduced in strength to 38 squadrons and 15 wing HQs. Very severe cuts were to follow shortly but not before No 48 Squadron represented the Regiment in the assault on Suez in November 1956 and was in occupation of El Gamil airfield when the ceasefire came into effect. Also at this time, it was necessary to call for Army air defence reinforcements for the airfields at Akrotiri and Nicosia where they were deployed under the command of Regiment Wings – and they recorded their admiration for the efficiency of their RAF Regiment counterparts.

Here in Cyprus units found themselves, a little later, engaged in internal security operations to meet the threats posed by EOKA terrorists. While the greater part of their duties lay in securing the airfields and other RAF installations on the island, they were also engaged in patrols, convoy escorts and VIP protection tasks which brought them into armed conflict with the terrorists.

In advocating the trip-wire concept of nuclear response, the 1957 Defence White Paper heralded startling changes in the shape and size of Her Majesty's Forces and, as a direct consequence, nine Wing HQs and 24 squadrons were disbanded in NW Europe (the entire Regiment force in Germany) and a further two Wing HQs and four squadrons ceased to exist in the Middle East. At home and abroad, and there solely in the Middle East, the Regiment ORBAT dwindled to 12 squadrons.

Not for the first time and certainly not the last, deep cuts heralded fresh commitments which soon began to impact heavily upon slimmer force levels. Four squadrons were needed in Northern Ireland in response to the resurgence of IRA ambitions and two more units were needed in Cyprus to meet the increasing EOKA threat. The situation there was contained but later escalated significantly in 1963 when strained relations between the Greek and Turkish communities erupted into open war, such that the threat to British lives and property in Nicosia and elsewhere was greater than the threat at that time to Air Force installations on the island. To restore peace,

three RAF Regiment squadrons were the first British units to enter Nicosia on 27 December where they were joined quickly by two more squadrons, one hurriedly dispatched from Britain. It was No 3 Wing's task to keep the two communities separated astride the so called 'green line' and, shortly after the Christmas period, it had at its disposal five RAF Regiment squadrons, two armoured car troops of the 14/20th Hussars, a battery of the Royal Horse Artillery, and a company of the 1st Sherwood Foresters – one of the larger commands exercised by a Regiment Wing Commander since the end of World War II.

Throughout this sensitive operation, which was not without its instances of ugly confrontation, it was noteworthy that the local authorities and the population readily accepted the intervention of RAF Regiment units and both sides co-operated with them. Whether this had anything to do with reverting to wearing blue battledress and repainting Saracen armoured personnel carriers blue-grey is a matter for conjecture, but the use of the RAF Regiment under circumstances such as this showed, not for the last time, the inherent value of a military force which is not directly associated with the obvious trappings of armed intervention by a foreign power.

It is of interest that before 1943, members of the corps did not have a blue-grey battledress to wear although up to this time, when internal security duties had not become so prevalent and British servicemen did not have type-designed disruptive pattern combat clothing, our khaki battledress was a sensible tactical rig for conventional operations in North-West Europe. It did, however, pose something of an identity problem to rely solely upon our much cherished and discreet shoulder title. This was evidenced in 1943 when the Royal Air Force Regiment undertook public duties for the first time at Buckingham Palace and were obliged to wear blue-grey No 1 RAF Home Dress to distinguish them from the Coldstream Guards clad in khaki battledress and steel helmets. This situation is, if anything, more acute today when just about all servicemen wear the same style of combat dress; hence the continuing importance of the shoulder title and RAF cap badge.

One of the most important concepts, which was grasped firmly by those who fashioned the Royal Air Force Regiment, was the need to engender and maintain the 'fighting spirit' outlook in a force which would be required to operate in a less than benign environment where personal and collective dependency in action could be critical. We heard earlier that this philosophy was one of the corner stones of the early arrangements. Another of those was tight and manageable units and sub-units with well defined

chains of command which were created, amongst other measures associated with dress and identity, to provide a gunner with a horizon which was low enough and near enough for him to see and appreciate. Considerations like these were so conspicuously absent in another RAF trade, namely that of fireman, that in 1959 when the firemen's morale and efficiency were at a very low ebb, the RAF Regiment was invited to take over the fire service. Although the results of a fireman's work and a gunner's work are totally different, the demands of the fireground are as taxing as those of the firefighter and, by the sensible imposition of proven man-management techniques and training methods, the blue-grey component of the fire services was successfully assimilated into the Regiment with technical advice continuing to be provided by specialist officers of the Air Force Department Fire Service. An advanced trade of Gunner/Fireman was established but it must be admitted that many more gunner NCOs than fireman NCOs elected to undertake additional training and alternative employment. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged widely that morale, equipment and fire fighting effectiveness improved considerably as a result of this marriage of convenience.

If assuming a responsibility for crash/fire and rescue services helped to underpin the Corps' place in the Royal Air Force, fresh demands to meet traditional tasks continued although the front-line strength stabilised at only two wing HQs and 10 squadrons. Towards the end of the '50s a further series of squadron redeployments became necessary, principally into Cyprus and Malta and to a new location – the island staging post of Gan where another internal security problem had arisen. Nonetheless, time was found in 1959 for Nos 1 and 2 Squadrons each to receive the Standard, the first RAF Regiment units to be recognised for 25 years of distinguished service.

In 1960, the demise of the RAF Regiment (Malaya) necessitated further redeployment of field squadrons from El Adem, the United Kingdom and Cyprus to cover the airfields at Butterworth, Changi and Tengah. No 2 Squadron, however, was withdrawn from Malta to return to the United Kingdom for the first time in 38 years of continuous service overseas, first as No 2 Armoured Car Company, then (briefly) as No 2702 Squadron and subsequently as No 2 Squadron RAF Regiment, soon to become parachute capable.

The need to balance operational commitments with developments in support functions was not overlooked when in 1960 the first steps were taken in creating a museum at the depot. Opened by the Chief of Air Staff,

it proved to be a valuable indoctrination and training aid for young officers and new recruits. It also generated intense interest (and artefacts) from old comrades. Having outgrown the former Link Trainer building, new and more spacious premises were opened at Catterick in 1972 by Sir Dermot Boyle, Chairman of the RAF Museum Trustees. In the same capacity, Sir Michael Beetham commissioned bigger and better museum premises, once again at Catterick, in 1984.

The end of national service in the early '60s naturally affected the corps in a variety of ways and gave rise to a new all-regular ceremonial duties unit, subsequently with a war role – the Queen's Colour Squadron – found exclusively by the RAF Regiment. On the downside, not since a national service LAC farmer's boy won a major equestrian trophy at the Royal Tournament has the Regiment been able to beat the best of the Cavalry and King's Troop in show jumping. Another new development at this time was the introduction of Regiment airmen into the posted strength of short-range transport squadrons to stiffen unit ground combat capabilities and to carry out ancillary tasks when they were not deployed as gunners.

If Cyprus and the Malay Peninsula had demanded unexpected reinforcements largely for internal security purposes, real war threatened in the Far East when Indonesia challenged the newly created state of Malaysia. A flurry of activity provided more LAA units and the conversion of in-theatre field squadrons to the LAA role to protect major RAF bases. A locally based regular jungle-trained field squadron, No 15, had moved quickly to Borneo, firstly to assist in suppressing the Brunei revolt and to secure the principal airfield, and subsequently in 1964 to support RAF helicopter operations throughout the jungle areas of Borneo. Meanwhile, their comrades in the LAA Squadrons across the Straits were stood-to at high states of readiness from September 1964 until August 1966 – the longest post-war high intensity alert in the Regiment's history.

Whilst Confrontation was at its height in the Far East, the internal security situation in Aden began to deteriorate and more Regiment support was needed. This could only be found by sending UK-based squadrons on 12-month unaccompanied tours. The pressure of such long detachments and quick turn rounds, often leading to cross-posting airmen from one squadron to another to provide full-strength units, resulted in a gunner spending only four out of 12 months at home in between ending one overseas emergency detachment and beginning another. In response to this very serious impact on family life, career and other training requirements, No 51 Squadron was reformed at Catterick in 1964. Nevertheless, the

maintenance of morale under these conditions was a pressing task for the officers and NCOs of the front-line squadrons. To compound the situations in Aden and South-East Asia, yet another trouble spot necessitated RAF Regiment attention when it took three field squadrons on a roulement cycle some 12 months to provide the airfield defence component of the RAF force in Zambia which was deployed in response to the Rhodesian unilateral declaration of independence.

My colleague Kingsley Oliver, who produced the first definitive history of the Royal Air Force Regiment, a book which I have drawn upon in preparing this paper, said of the late '50s to the mid '60s, 'it was an exceptionally busy time, even for a force which was inured to the problems of making bricks without straw'. That observation needs no further amplification.

**AIR MARSHAL SOWREY:** Finally, to bring us right up to date, we turn to Air Commodore Mickey Witherow.

## THE ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT 1967 TO THE PRESENT

### Air Commodore M S Witherow

The year 1967 was the Regiment's 25th Anniversary year, marked by a fine Review by HM The Queen and the presentation of a new Queen's Colour, but it was also something of a landmark in the Regiment's operational history. Not only did the Regiment provide rear-guard cover for the RAF's withdrawal from Aden, the start of the final recession from East of Suez, but we also brought the world's first land-based fully air portable short-range air defence missile system, Tigercat, into service. Crude and primitive though Tigercat may seem today, it was a remarkable 'first', for it opened a new horizon. That was not only in defence sales where it earned many millions in exports largely on the back of RAF Regiment sales support teams and demonstrators, but it put the Regiment into a world lead in operational doctrine and tactics as well as engineering and logistics for a SHORAD missile system; there simply was not another one in the world.

The next few years saw the steadily increasing commitment of the Regiment to Oman (despite being 'East of Suez'), the commencement of withdrawal from the Far East, the first RAF Regiment deployment to the Caribbean, when No 26 Squadron supported the apparently risible operations in Anguilla in 1969, and the first deployments of squadrons to Northern Ireland in 1969. So into the next decade, which began with great promise for the RAF Regiment. The world continued to be in turmoil and the Soviet Union, hot on its splendid record in Czechoslovakia only two years earlier, looked troublesome enough to give us all a great deal of excitement and interesting careers for ever. The IRA was beginning to look somewhat more formidable than it had done in its earlier irruption of 1957, but we were still cracking jokes such as 'What do you do when an Irishman throws a grenade at you?' Answer: 'Pull out the pin and throw it back'.

Moreover we still had legacies of Empire, which were clearly designed for the benefit of the RAF Regiment and still promised us a chance for adventure. Oman, simmering during the last years of the 1960s, bubbled up in 1970; we were still in Bahrein; there was the legacy of Anguilla, which kept the Regiment on a roulement deployment to Antigua for several more years, and others were still to come. Certainly we were kept busy, and for many years as it turned out we, in the squadrons at least, could forget that slightly ominous shadow that had recurred from time to time over the years as to whether or not there needed to be an RAF Regiment at all. As usual,



there were enough baddies around to suit us very nicely!

1970 saw the return of the RAF Regiment's squadrons to Germany, something much hoped-for within the Regiment ever since the adoption of NATO's 14/3 strategic doctrine a few years earlier, whereby the tactical importance of RAF Germany's ability to survive conventional attack by air or on the ground was re-asserted. This final reversal of the notorious Sandys axe of 1957 led to a major modernisation and re-equipment of the Regiment in the coming years. In particular, plans for the introduction of the ET 316 surface-to-air missile system under its new name of Rapier, were confirmed. Its introduction in 1974 as a replacement for the Bofors gun (and Tigercat) was of profound importance to the RAF Regiment.

Meanwhile, in 1971, just as the RAF Regiment became heavily involved in Oman, Guatemala revived its historic claim to British Honduras. Anti-aircraft defence was essential to reinforcement and so Tigercat was deployed, only to cause the Organisation of American States to resurrect the spectre of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis at the introduction of missiles to Central America. Ludicrous as it seems, the RAF was required to replace its tactical SAM with Bofors guns. By 1975 the UK had a standing commitment to the defence of Belize, as the country had been re-named. At the same time, the 1974/75 Defence Review had cut the UK's overseas forces drastically. Rapier, by now well deployed in Germany, had been declared to SACEUR and so, regardless of OAS sensitivities, was not an option for national redeployment, short of significant hostilities breaking out. Consequently, units withdrawn from Cyprus after the 1974 Turkish invasion were formed into three new squadrons of Bofors guns just when they were intended for scrapping, to sustain a roulement pattern in support of Belize from the UK. Tigercat was also retained in the UK well past its original (and literal!) sell-by date, as a back-up to the Bofors units. Tigercat was deployed again in earnest to Belize in face of the Guatemalan invasion threat of July 1977, where it remained until Rapier superseded both guns and Tigercat in late 1978.

An interesting footnote to this episode lay in the donation to Zambia of our three Tigercat fire units by the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, following the famous 1978 'Gleneagles Summit' of Commonwealth leaders on the Rhodesian problem. One was already allotted to the Museum of the RAF Regiment and Associated Overseas Forces at Catterick, when it had to be withdrawn, refurbished and sent to Zambia. It was not to be until 1982, when No 63 Squadron RAF Regiment (the first of the 1974 RAF Regiment Rapier squadrons) took a Tigercat launcher from the Argentineans in the

Falklands, that the RAF Regiment was able to display a specimen in its Museum! Ironically, it was the RAF Regiment which had trained the Argentineans in the employment of Tigercat.

1974/75 saw the notorious defence review that took such a middle-cut salmon steak from the RAF that the manpower imbalance in middle-ranking officers and senior NCOs was only beginning to come right in the late 1980s, just in time to be wrecked again. For the RAF Regiment, the most profound statement to come out of it was that 'the RAF Regiment will revert to the airfield defence role'. I never understood that, for that was what I thought it was all about anyway. Perhaps we shall find out in discussion today, 20 years later!

However, a serious consequent evolutionary change was to affect the Regiment in 1976, when the RAF branch and trade structure was rationalised. Firemen were separated from the Regiment, although Regiment officers retained staff and, in many cases, operational responsibility for the fire services. The RAF Regiment was brought together with the Provost Branch to form the 'Security Branch' and the airmen's trades were grouped under the 'Security' Trade Group. The Commandant-General became Director General of Security and officers of both branches above the rank of wing commander were to merge into a single career-field as Security Branch officers, so losing their original branch identity. This last point led to a number of practical complications and it was quite clear that the plan, which was genuinely hoped to enhance career prospects, had been inadequately thought through. In addition, on an emotional issue senior RAF Regiment officers, who had to remove their RAF Regiment shoulder badges from their uniforms as part of this exercise, resented losing their Corps identity and, interestingly, the Regiment's gunners were badly upset that 'their' senior officers should no longer be distinguishable. We, the officers affected, felt as we believe any General Duties officer would if he had to discard his brevet on completing his time in station-level appointments. Most officers just did not obey orders and in 1978 the decision was rescinded, to the delight of all concerned. Indeed it is arguable that the 'shotgun marriage' of 1976 inhibited the excellent co-operation that the Provost Branch and the RAF Regiment had developed in such theatres as Aden and Northern Ireland prior to that time.

It is interesting that with the two branches once again de-merged, RAF air base defence today in terrorist peacetime has become a tightly integrated operation of every branch and trade, much as Churchill appears to have envisaged things in 1941. That is history; no doubt many of you are aware

that we are well entrenched once again in that well-known, over-populated square, No 1, re-inventing that over-invented device the wheel! Merger is again on the cards.

Rapier's entry to service in 1974 represented an enormous fillip to the Regiment, which was seen thereby to be moving out of the equivalent of biplanes into jets; and this was not the end of it, for to march with this level of technology with the primary weapon system must come all requisite communications, logistics and training. There was a distinct 'feel good' factor abroad in the Regiment. Simultaneously, a subtle change was affecting the entire RAF. NATO's 14/3 doctrine required a reversion to ground-tactical thinking throughout the RAF to an extent probably not seen since Desert Air Force days; thinking perhaps driven and certainly best illustrated by that other RAF world leader, Harrier, in whose tactics for ground survival the Regiment's expertise was fully exploited. Major RAF units were to be back close to the front-line, as defined by land forces. To survive and to fight effectively under these conditions, the RAF would need the latest and best of the Army's new infantry equipment and the RAF Regiment was tasked to represent the RAF's interests in development of these hitherto exclusively Army-developed items. For the first time, all new land-forces equipment and clothing was to be developed with a full RAF voice where the RAF had a need.

This also benefited the Army, which gained from the RAF approach to equipment specification and trialling. Thereafter, instead of inheriting equipment not quite suitable for RAF purposes as had so often been the case previously, land service equipment would be developed specifically to meet our needs as much as the Army's. The files since are full of the Army's acknowledgement of the value of the RAF contribution, and perhaps never more so than in the case of the small-arms for the 1980s, in which 4,000 defects were found when it finally entered service – 1,400 of them specifically identified by the Regiment alone.

Experience with the Harrier and tactical support helicopter units also re-awoke the RAF's awareness of the value of field operations in developing character and leadership. Thus, RAF officer, NCO and recruit training was to be profoundly influenced by tactical field scenarios, with RAF Regiment expertise being heavily drawn upon at staff and instructor levels. My purpose in appearing to digress into these areas from a simple chronological account of the Regiment's history in the last quarter-century is to highlight something so often misunderstood by those who argue for abolition of the RAF Regiment in the search for economies in straitened

times, as though it were some sort of luxury appendage. You may recall an article by John Keegan in 1990 in the *Daily Telegraph*. The core of the error, so prevalent in the Army which sees a role conflict whenever it faces cuts, is the misapprehension that the RAF Regiment as just another regiment rather than an integral element of the RAF's branch and trade structure whose value to the RAF depends upon the experience gained in RAF Regiment operational units. It is no accident that France, Germany, Belgium and, most significantly, the United States have all produced their own emulations of the RAF Regiment. It is an immensely successful formula, to be jettisoned at the RAF's peril. In support of this let us look briefly at the RAF Regiment's relationship with the United States Air Force.

When in 1965, after a series of appalling losses of aircraft and other assets, let alone Air Force manpower on the ground in Vietnam, the USAF turned to the RAF for advice on airbase defence and set about establishing their 'Combat Security Police' organisation, we were unaware of the quite extraordinary developments that would flow eventually from the close association that was to follow. Fifteen years of exchanges, with the Regiment training USAF officers and men both in the UK and the USA, were already established history when in 1979 I read in the *Daily Telegraph* one morning a modest item which simply said that the new Prime Minister (Margaret Thatcher) had agreed directly with the President of the United States to sell Rapier to the USAF. It was to be deployed on USAF bases in the UK and to be manned by the RAF Regiment. Somewhat surprised, as the acting Director, at this means of finding out news about the Regiment, I showed the article to the Commandant-General of the day. He was staggered. Likewise the VCAS, who said there had been no study and policy could not be made 'on the hoof' like this. Indeed he said, and I was present, 'Governments have fallen for less than this.' Of course, none of us had learned what we were dealing with in the new PM!

So unfolded a remarkable chapter in the Regiment's history. The new squadrons were indeed formed and rapidly achieved a first-class reputation with their USAF hosts. Becoming fully operational in 1987, their success was such that the Commander of the Third Air Force reported to the Pentagon in 1989 that he considered his Rapiers to be the best quality asset he had in his Command for discipline, deportment, efficiency and combat readiness, providing an example to all ranks of the USAF under his command. Never before had the USA entrusted its assets to foreign troops, operating as an integral part of its own forces.

An even more remarkable development was to follow. Whilst the Rapier squadrons were essentially RAF Regiment units operating under USAF command, in 1984 it was proposed by the Americans on the strength of their success with Rapier, that USAF UK-based Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) cruise missile unit close defence should be provided by totally integrated Anglo-US ground defence squadrons. This was agreed with the result that half the manning of these USAF combat units was provided by RAF Regiment officers and men throughout the five years that ground-launched cruise missiles were deployed in the UK. British and American officers, NCOs and men were totally integrated at every level. Their equipment – except for uniforms, arms and vehicles – was, by contrast to the Rapier squadrons, entirely American. Only American field rations generated potential for dissent, the ‘Rocks’ having a marked preference for Compo! Sadly, the political sensitivity of the cruise missile issue prevented this magnificent example of international defence co-operation from having the publicity it deserved. The INF force disbanded with the minimum of publicity and another superb diplomatic coup by British and American troops faded away as if it had never been.

Meanwhile in 1979 the Royal Auxiliary Air Force was resurrected from its post-Sandys suspension and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment had the honour of paving the way. It was a great experience at every level to set up the new units, at sites carefully selected to test the water of demography as much as to provide defence support at major bases. The first surprise was the genuine foundation of patriotism that was uncovered and the remarkable efforts to succeed made by those who committed themselves. The RAF strove also to ensure maximum territorial identity, working closely with TAVRAs and county establishment figures to achieve this. Whilst manning seldom attains 100%, enthusiasm and commitment by all has made our Auxiliary wings and squadrons into excellent operational units, with ever-increasing operational burdens heading their way even as we speak in the wake of ‘Options for Change’.

Perhaps the most controversial issue involving the RAF Regiment in the 1980s surrounded the introduction of the Scorpion range of light armoured combat vehicles, the Combat Vehicles, Reconnaissance (Tracked), or CVR(T) for short. Sadly, there were instant suspicions in some quarters that the RAF Regiment was squandering resources in order to resurrect the dashing days of the desert armoured cars. ‘Why is the Regiment going into the tank business?’ I was asked by a visiting air marshal in 1980, just after I took command of Catterick. We were not, of course, going into the tank

business.

It had become clear during the 1970s that our Landrover-borne field squadrons were not adequate for all weather cross-country operations in the rugged terrain of Germany in particular, whether near to our bases or operating with the RAF field forces. Furthermore, they offered no NBC protection or small-arms and splinter protection. Finally, the core of our firepower, the 81 mm mortar, was not considered to have the versatility to engage opportunity targets in the off-base patrolling or forward area field force scenario. We needed potent direct-fire weapons with high mobility. For the troops who were to provide defensive cover to our air-base Rapiers, deployed five or six kilometres beyond base perimeters, let alone to Harriers miles from any main base, all these were particularly serious deficiencies.

Accordingly, RAF Germany sponsored a series of field trials of different kinds of vehicles, borrowed from BAOR. The most successful were the CVR(W) (that is 'wheeled') family of armoured vehicles, centred upon Saladin and Saracen and of 1950s vintage. Sadly, they were unsustainable in even the short term, because there was no spares support and wheeled combat vehicles were to be superseded entirely by the new light tracked vehicles. Nevertheless a paper produced in MOD during 1978 and based upon some four years' experience of these trials recommended retaining the field squadron but supplementing it with one flight of seven armoured personnel carriers and a section (ie two) of equivalent armoured direct gunfire support vehicles. The intended inventory for each RAF Regiment field squadron was therefore nine vehicles, seven APCs and two fire-support vehicles, a grand total of 54 for the six squadrons. The preferred fire support vehicle was Scimitar, carrying the Rarden 30mm cannon, but at that time Rarden was running into such difficulty that it looked likely to be discontinued. We turned then to Scorpion, an identical vehicle mounting a versatile 76 mm gun offering direct and indirect fire and several options of warhead. Spartan, a reconnaissance vehicle in the same family, was seen as a suitable small APC, if it could be stripped of its infantry radar fit. At the same time the pending introduction of the small-arms system for the 1980s reduced the infantry section from its traditional nine men to small fire teams of four each under the command of an NCO ideally suited to the new potential APC. Both vehicles had the great attraction of having a 'footprint' of only six pounds per square inch: invaluable on airfields.

Air Force Board approval was sought and given for the acquisition of 54

CVR(T). Funds were allotted. Planning began and orders placed, with a delivery target date of 1982. Then we were told of a substantial underspend on front-line equipment which could not be redeemed because of impossible lead-times for most RAF systems. If we could find equipment for the Regiment that was readily available in the short term, we should order it. By coincidence a Central American order for a large number of CVR(T) of all sorts was cancelled and we were told we could have the lot if we wished. We did and re-equipped the field squadrons entirely with CVR(T). This amounted to some 168 armoured vehicles of four different types. A series of excellent lunches at Alvis followed and so the light armoured squadrons of 1981 to 1991 came into being, not on the strength of the squanderbug but rather on underspend.

However, at this time the Regiment was sustaining the most strenuous roulement regime in its history and one that became the most strenuous in the Forces. Consequently, there was almost no chance to work the units up to full operational status after initial conversion, which had been so successfully carried out in co-operation with the Royal Armoured Corps at Catterick. Thus the impression grew that we had bitten off more than we could chew. It seemed to many that we had wantonly spent scarce resources on so-called 'tanks' we could not use. When dissident voices were heard within the Regiment, especially from those who had been bitterly hurt by the loss of the 81 mm mortar, it began to look as if little thought had been given to what we were up to.

However, in 1988 a so-called 'garrison' field squadron was formed for Northern Ireland, the roulement ended and the pressure was relieved, so serious training at last got under way. Much was contributed to training philosophy and techniques, of benefit to the Arm almost as much as to ourselves. Happily that training was not found wanting when, in 1991, No 1 Squadron RAF Regiment was able to deploy to Saudi Arabia for the Gulf War, where it operated in support of the RAF helicopter force with 1st Armoured Division. The unit took part in all 1st Division operations in the liberation of Kuwait, taking hundreds of prisoners in the process. I have a letter from General Sir Peter de la Billière in which he says: 'I am immensely impressed with your magnificent Regiment, which is making an invaluable contribution to our war effort.' He was referring of course not only to our light armoured squadron but to the four Rapier squadrons and the scores of other RAF Regiment officers and men that between them made up no less than 19% of the RAF's strength in that war.

However, in common with many units at war in 1991, even then the

plans were being laid for withdrawing CVR(T) from RAF service, for RAF CVR(T) was effectively killed when the great global enemy of the past 45 years played his final trick on us and became friendly, causing the UK to throw away its war-toys. Virgil, in *The Aeneid*, cautioned 2,000 years ago, 'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes', but we as a nation never learn.

Perhaps the Regiment can take comfort in that, like the Vulcan in 1982, our Scorpion family of fighting vehicles did actually go to war, just before their demise.

Throughout almost all the period I have covered, the RAF Regiment has been in Northern Ireland in squadron or wing strength. At the start of the contemporary 'troubles', squadrons were sent first to Ballykelly, then to Aldergrove, where for many years they covered the security of the civil airport as well as RAF interests. For most of the time they covered Bishop's Court as well. The IRA's threat to raze Aldergrove airport was thwarted more than once in the early years. 'Checkpoint Delta', the master checkpoint for all airport entry to and exit from the province, was exclusively given over to the RAF Regiment and became an established part of the Regiment's life for no less than 19 years. Less well known is the fact that the Regiment squadrons covering Aldergrove held a tactical area of responsibility of well over 100 square kilometres, which became the most heavily patrolled area in the whole province, utilising foot, vehicle and helicopter tactics by day and night. Moreover, until the Army was given extra forces for the emergency, the Regiment provided squadrons on several occasions to support their operations in the cities of Londonderry and Belfast, whilst in 1969 No 33 Wing RAF Regiment, with a squadron of cavalry armoured cars and a battery of RA in the infantry role under command, replaced a RM Commando in the border country around Omagh, Enniskillen, Dungannon and Armagh. If the RAF Regiment were 'just another Regiment' as I suggested earlier some see it, then it is a unique one, if only for providing by now some 26 year's unbroken front-line service in Northern Ireland. This tradition is being continued by No 3 Squadron, established in 1988 as the 'garrison' unit, to break the debilitating cycle of the dreaded 'roulement' shared for so long by just three (and, occasionally a fourth) UK-based squadrons.

Finally, what does the future hold? A study called 'RAF Regiment 2000', intended to set the pattern for the future, was conducted in 1989 by Gp Capt (now AVM) John Feesey. The report was both shrewd and objective, and it is particularly interesting that he concluded, with all due argument and sound tactical insight, that the Regiment would be better



prepared for the next century if its light armoured squadrons were to become mainly Landrover-borne, with a flight of light APCs and a section of two gunfire-support CVR(T). You may agree that the author of the original 1978 paper could be excused a wry smile!

However, it was hard to accept the Study's recommendation to abolish the wings. Whatever the argument for this, which was largely based upon the fact that our squadrons were normally deployed singly and well integrated into the wider base defence schemes, it removed a vital level of command from an officer's career-structure. We now have no operating level that can compare to that of a battalion commander in the Army or a commander of a flying squadron in our own Service. Nor have we the ready-made capacity to intervene as we have often done at battalion level when needed, as for example in Cyprus and, as I have just mentioned, in Northern Ireland. Of course, as with every study undertaken in recent years, 'RAF Regiment 2000' is now history and most of it overtaken by greater events, but excepting that one reservation on the wings, which I made strongly at the time, I suspect that we would have lost a great deal more than has been the case, had not the evidence and arguments of that report been available to today's staff officers.

So today we have lost our two-star Commandant-General and the wing HQs and are losing our USAF Rapier squadrons. Our Depot home of nearly 50 years, RAF Catterick, has been passed over to the Army, although we are fortunate to retain a very well found Depot station, now at Honington. We have a remaining total manpower of 2,090, with group captains at the top. There is an order of battle of five Rapier squadrons (three with FSC; two with FSB1(M)) to be part Auxiliary-manned; three field squadrons (part Auxiliary- manned) plus one in Northern Ireland, and the Queen's Colour Squadron with its dual role. There are five Auxiliary squadrons. The serious question arises now of viability. Does the RAF Regiment offer a career for officer or gunner? Does it offer the experience-base that is necessary to sustain RAF ground combat standards? What are its aims and roles? Possibly most important, will it continue to provide that sense of elitism, esprit de corps and sheer pride which has always been its hallmark and motivated it to the highest standards? One should never forget the very perceptive thinking that governed the final paragraph of the founding Memorandum to The King on 5 January 1942 which Air Marshal Pocock quoted earlier, concerning the importance of a title which would '...foster a fighting spirit and high morale'. Such truths are matters of the spirit and, like hard-earned insignia, are eternal to the fighting man, whatever the

colour of his uniform.

These are serious questions, the answers to which serving officers must decide, and whilst in the past we have asked the same questions, in 1945, 1957 and 1974 in particular, we have inevitably had the answer found for us by those whom we should truly honour in our pantheon of benefactors: Hitler, Stalin, Nasser, Soekarno, Krushev, Grivas, Adams and others, to whom we on this platform at least owe happy and fulfilling careers! This time circumstances are different. There is no present visible strategic enemy. Consequently, the Royal Navy has lost many ships and many great units of the Army have been sacrificed. The RAF has taken a tremendous caning, costing whole squadrons of aircraft, the nuclear strike role and swathes of manpower, imposed by people displaying crass ignorance of air power, mesmerised by such irrelevancies as the Israeli Air Force and deaf to the best professional advice in the world. Yet still the Royal Air Force supports its aerodrome defence corps. If nothing else, this suggests that the Regiment has surely won its place as an integral part of its parent service. Within that perspective, we should take great heart from the fact, but we must ask ourselves whether this time there will nevertheless be a different outcome.

Perhaps that may come up in the discussion, but please do not let speculation on the future dominate it. This is an historical seminar, designed to capture the record of history for those who follow us. There are some clever serving officers who have the future in their hands; I only touch on it insofar as history, as no-one here should need reminding, is not bunk. Intelligently addressed, history can carry invaluable lessons for the future, and anyway it provides a nice, controversial loose end on which to conclude!

**AIR COMMODORE THORNE:** As today's Commandant General of the RAF Regiment I should like to congratulate the speakers on their excellent presentations and to make two observations on the last speaker. First, the Air Force Board Standing Committee, has endorsed the current RAF Regiment's five field squadrons, which are to remain as full-time regular field squadrons; there are no plans to change them to 'cadreised' units. Secondly, it should be noted that the Regiment has been tasked with a continuous roulement since 1982 to the Falkland Islands where we have mounted a Rapier squadron, and up to Christmas 1993, another in Belize as well. That has meant that some men – I know of at least five – who have been committed to a minimum of ten to twelve roulements of four months

unaccompanied detachment since 1982. So the pressure of roulements remains and I think they will continue until cessation of operations in the Falklands Islands.

## DISCUSSION

### **Air Vice-Marshal Herrington**

Air Commodore Witherow mentioned the fascination of the American Air Force with the RAF Regiment concept, not only in air defence but also in field defence. I seem to remember when I was Director of Service Intelligence looking very hard at the internal threat in this country from *Spetznaz* forces. The American Air Force, and to a certain extent the American Navy, based over here became very well aware of the vulnerability of their installations. Having no comparable ground forces available for their own defence they were in serious discussion with the RAF – and the RAF Regiment in particular – over the provisions of some regular and certainly a large number of auxiliary squadrons to help defend their ground installations, not only air bases but all their other installations in this country. I think to a certain extent this failed because of a lack of financial backing from Congress. Could you comment on where that programme did eventually go?

### **Air Commodore Witherow**

When the American auxiliary field squadron concept started they proposed, on the back of the success of Rapier and what they saw of the RAF Auxiliary Regiment, that we should raise auxiliary squadrons for the defence of the United States installations in the UK. It reached quite extraordinary proportions; they were talking of as many as 26 squadrons as recently as 1987/88. The scheme fell down in the end, I believe, because of internecine politics between the services in the Pentagon, and the money appropriations were not there. The United States Air Force was certainly very keen on it and, since we were hardly reluctant to support them, a huge amount of work went into it for which there was no established capability. This diverted several staff officers, almost full time, from their normal duties; several times everything was ready for them, waiting for the word 'go'. If the Americans had agreed it would have happened, but it then just fell flat, petered out and died.

### **Air Marshal Sowrey**

Let me add a point about the American involvement with their volunteer forces. After 'Options for Change' the ratio between our two great air forces, the USAF and ourselves, has remained at ten to one, ten United States combat personnel to one RAF. But in the field of reserves the ratio is seventy to one, an amazing disproportion one might think. One of the

reasons, of course, is the existence of the United States Air Force National Guard and other State forces, but it is an interesting statistic to bear in mind when talking about auxiliaries.

### **Cecil James**

Arising out of what has just been said and what was said earlier about the RAF auxiliary squadrons, the genesis of this was in the mid-'70s when there was concern about the lack of relationship between the Royal Air Force and the regions of the country. We had lost in the '50s the link between counties and cities and the flying squadrons and, apart from that little unit which supported Coastal Command, as it was, at Northwood and as far as I know still exists, there was no link at all other than at the junior level, the Air Training Corps. When this was looked at by Arthur Griffiths and me, we came to the conclusion that in modern conditions it was only the Regiment that could establish units which would have clear territorial links and arouse local enthusiasm. It is no longer possible to do that with a flying squadron and the Regiment is the only way of maintaining that kind of link. I am delighted to hear that the auxiliary squadrons seem to be in good heart, having been in on the ground floor of getting agreement for their institution.

### **MRAF Sir Michael Beetham**

What Cecil James says is perfectly correct; it started at that time. But, of course, the pressure became greater in my time as CAS. We wanted to re-establish our links with local populations which we were certainly losing. There was a critical need, with manpower shortages and overstretch, actually to be able to defend our airfields properly, and I had felt for years, going back to my experience in Aden, that every RAF station ought to have a Regiment squadron for its own defence. We have not achieved this, of course, but at least the auxiliaries provide a reasonable way to do it. That is why we put the pressure on to get the auxiliaries really started, following up the initiative that had begun under my predecessor.

### **Flt Lt Steve Tomkins**

Something that should be included in the historical record is the invaluable contribution that RAF Regiment officers have made in recent years to United Nations service in Cambodia and, as they continue to do today, in former Yugoslavia. I agree with a previous speaker on the esteem in which RAF Regiment officers are held. I have served in Bosnia for six months and it may well be that it was not just because I was a British officer but also a RAF Regiment officer that I was so well regarded. As

soon as I walked into any room in service of the United Nations in Bosnia I was immediately accorded great respect because of that.

### **Air Commodore Thorne**

Returning to an earlier point I should like to record that the Air Force Board and Ministers have recognised the need for an operational role for seven field squadrons for the Royal Air Force, but have for the time being accepted the military risk to continue with five. The thinking behind this is that in future, as development of the Rapid Reaction Forces (Air) proceeds, there will be a need to protect up to three forward operating bases and a forward mounting base, which equals four. In addition we have the Harrier Force that may be operating under a new concept of operations called 'hub and spoke'. The analogy similar to a bicycle wheel. The hub being the main airfield, and the spokes used as a line of communication and supply to the main airfield. Clearly, if that is separated from the protection of the forward operating base, then extra protection will be needed and here, of course, a field squadron will have a major part to play. In addition, the support helicopter force, which will operate as part of the army's forward supply, will need its own protection. On the other hand, the Helicopter Force could very well be in a different theatre, split in two halves, where again there would be a need for a seventh field squadron to protect the other half of the force. The point I want to make is that we do have endorsement of the requirement for seven field squadrons. On the Rapier side, as was mentioned before, we have endorsement to procure a brand new FSC Rapier squadron, which is a quantum leap forward. Similar to the GR3 Harrier compared to the GR7 Harrier, which is not really a Harrier but an altogether different aircraft type, so is Rapier FSC to the old Rapier FSB1(M). Three Rapier FSC squadrons are to be formed, plus the support element of the operational conversion unit, which will be large enough to form another FSC squadron. So, in fact there will be four, which will allow us continual roulement down to the Falkland Islands leaving a residue of two Rapier FSB1(M) squadrons currently based at RAF Scampton, which are in the process of being cadreised. These two squadrons are about a quarter of the way through their conversion programme and work-up to operational status. So far, the conversion is progressing satisfactorily. Therefore, in about a year or so, they will be evaluated before being declared fully operational. In summary, the future plan is four Rapier FSC, two cadreised FSB1(M) and five field squadrons. This gives a bottom line of about 2,300 RAF Regiment personnel which at the present has only been

marginally reduced following the results of ‘Option for Change’ and ‘Prospect’.

## **Chairman’s Summary and Conclusions**

### **Air Marshal Sowrey**

Today we have seen how the development and organisation of the RAF Regiment have mirror-imaged the changes in the concept of the use of air power and the way this has been achieved. One of the basic principles of war is the security of the base. To us, the launch pad be it for aircraft or ground-based weapons is our base.

In 1914-18 the Western Front was largely static – airfields operated behind a fixed front line. Abroad the simplicity of aircraft made it possible to operate from a modest-sized field or sand strip, again under Army protection. The inter-war period of Air Control needed modest ground forces to sustain the effectiveness of the use of aircraft.

1939-45, especially in the desert, western Europe and the Far East, brought to fruition the effectiveness of air power, especially in the land battle. There was the need to ensure that close support had the highest priority, and as its name implies, it was forward-based and close to the enemy with the risks that entailed to one’s own airfields and the need to act offensively to secure them. Thus the RAF Regiment came into being. This year’s coverage of D-Day and beyond has brought out how much of the initial invasion planning was concerned with capturing airfields or terrain which could make an airfield. A degree of simplicity still remained in that aircraft such as the Spitfire and Typhoon could operate from a predominantly grass surface.

Post-war, the VSTOL Harrier capable of wide dispersal brought greater vulnerability to its operating sites – met again by the flexibility of the Regiment and the Service in facing the threat. In the Cold War the low-level air defence and the integrity of UK airfields was an essential part of the deterrence of war – being able, ready and willing to fight – so as not to have to do so. The introduction of ground launched cruise missiles was instrumental in facing down the Soviet Union and adding to their defence problems and costs, ultimately leading to the collapse of the Marxist System.

Now we face a world, in the words of the Chief of Defence Intelligence, which is more dangerous than it has been in this century apart from in the two world wars. The balance of terror with its predictability of the type of

attack the Soviets might launch has gone. In its place is a fragmented control of nuclear weapons in the countries of the former Soviet Union. The ultimate world shortage of energy, and equally water, has a war-making potential as we have already seen in the Gulf. Refugees moving from the 'have not' countries to the 'haves' produce instability as does Islamic fundamentalism. When 20 countries are likely to have a ballistic missile capability by the year 2000, when components off the shelf will enable a ground-launched cruise missile to reach London from North Africa, with accuracy measured in metres, then Third World countries can easily acquire a First World military capability. And we do not always help ourselves – the Iraqi hardened aircraft shelters were UK designed, and naval losses in the Falklands were from French and American built aircraft.

In this world of uncertainty what are the lessons from the past? That, as we have heard, the unexpected is always with us. That UN peace-keeping may involve fighting. That men and women in uniform are essential, as are a high standard of training, flexibility, morale and dedication to the Service. The Regiment combines all these with the offensive spirit, a capability for defence, and the ability to become more closely involved in security. I commend the RAF Regiment to any Government who cares to listen.

All that remains for me to do now is to thank a very great number of people who made today possible. First of all the Museum who let us come here for nothing, which is wonderful; Edgar Spridgeon who in fact does all the acoustics, very largely out of his own equipment; the Secretary who took all of your money and arranged the meals; all of you for coming and particularly the Service officers amongst you. Part of the effort of our Society must go in defining and drawing lessons from the past so that the generation of today can see that there is some sense in history. It may not enable you to do your job, flying a Tornado or whatever else it happens to be, but it should help you in leading men and women and that, after all, is part of the job of anyone in the Service today. Also we ought to thank Mickey Witherow who in fact produced the programme, master-minded it and persuaded others to come and talk. He has been a member of the Society ever since it started, but this is the first of the seminars that he has ever been able to attend. Last but not least to him again, and all the other speakers for making it a marvellous day.



## MAIN SPEAKER PROFILES

### **Biography of Air Vice-Marshal D A Pocock. CBE RAF (Ret'd)**



Air Vice-Marshal Donald Arthur Pocock enlisted in the Royal Air Force in July 1940 having been a Cadet 2nd Lieutenant in an Army Cadet Regiment, and was commissioned in July 1941. On the formation of the Royal Air Force Regiment he was automatically transferred to that Corps.

In 1941 he went to the Middle East and established a school at Amman, Transjordan to train ground gunners and in 1942 took part in the Western Desert campaign, with responsibility for the ground and low-level air defence of a forward fighter wing. During this campaign at the age of 23 he was selected to form and command one of the new RAF Regiment squadrons. He subsequently commanded the squadron in North Africa, the Middle East, Italy and the Balkans. In 1946 he was appointed to command an RAF Regiment wing in Austria which was employed on occupational and disarmament duties.

From 1946 until 1948 he formed and commanded a wing of the Aden Protectorate Levies and, after seven years service outside the United Kingdom, returned to a staff appointment at Headquarters Transport Command with the task of making RAF Regiment units 'air-portable'.

Following a tour in Germany, he attended a course at the RAF Staff College after which he returned to Headquarters 2nd Tactical Air Force for a staff appointment. He subsequently served in staff appointments at the Air Ministry, Allied Air Forces Central Europe (Fontainebleau, France), in Cyprus and Singapore, following which he was appointed Commandant of the RAF Regiment Depot, Catterick, prior to being promoted air commodore and assuming the appointment as Director of Ground Defence. He was appointed Commandant-General in January 1973 and became the first Commandant-General to have entered the service as a ground gunner in 1940 and progressed to become head of the Corps.

In 1975, following retirement from the Royal Air Force, he joined the British Aircraft Corporation Guided Weapons Division as Air Defence Adviser, Rapier Marketing and was subsequently appointed General Manager for a large contract to supply and support the sale of the Rapier missile system to Iran. He remained in Iran until the 1979 revolution when the Shah was deposed. On return from Iran he became Director of the

British Metallurgical Plant Constructors' Association and was responsible for bringing together into a single association three separate associations concerned with the design and supply of major plant to the metals industries.

He finally retired in 1986 and took up voluntary appointments with the Royal Air Forces Association, the St John Ambulance and as Chairman of the League of RAF Regiment Associations.

He was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1957, and a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1975. He was appointed an Aide de Camp to Her Majesty the Queen – 1967-70. He married in 1947 Dorothy Griffiths and they have two sons and three daughters.



### **Air Commodore Marcus Spence Witherow**

Air Commodore Witherow was commissioned into the Royal Air Force Regiment in 1956. He saw service as a junior officer with the Regiment in Aden and the surrounding Protectorate, the Persian Gulf, Libya and Germany as well as in UK-based units within the 'Strategic Reserve' of the 1960s before becoming ADC to the AOC-in-C Transport Command in 1966. Promoted squadron leader in 1968, he commanded No 26 Squadron RAF Regiment, operating at various times in the Caribbean, Oman and Bahrain, before attending the RAF Staff College in 1971. An appointment in the Ministry of Defence was followed by promotion to wing commander and NATO experience as a foundation member of HQAAFCE, Ramstein. The Air Warfare Course followed, leading to command of No 3 Wing RAF Regiment, with particular responsibility for the short-range air defence of Belize International Airport. Promoted group captain in 1978, he became Deputy Director RAF Regiment and then in 1980, Commandant of the RAF Regiment Depot, RAF Catterick. The Royal College of Defence Studies followed in 1983, after which he became Command RAF Regiment Officer, RAF Germany. Promoted air commodore in 1985, he was appointed Director of Personnel (Ground), with career management responsibility for all non-flying RAF Officers (except the Medical, Chaplains and Legal Branches), before becoming Director, RAF Regiment in 1987.

He elected premature voluntary retirement in 1990 and has since worked

in London as Head of Administration for a major Career Consultancy.



**Group Captain M Keith Batt MBE**

Born and educated in Hampshire, Group Captain Batt served for 24 years in the Royal Air Force Regiment specialising ultimately in the mechanised infantry role of the Corps. In aggregate, he spent nearly 10 years at the RAF Regiment Depot Catterick in North Yorkshire in a succession of operational and training appointments including that of Chief Instructor and ultimately Commandant, interspersed with service in command and staff appointments in Australia, the Ministry of Defence, the Pentagon, Aden, Northern Ireland, Germany, HQ Allied Forces Central Europe in the Netherlands and at HQ Strike Command. Between 1974 and 1978 he commanded No 15 Squadron RAF Regiment which, as a field squadron, was assigned to the Harrier Force and also engaged in the NI roulement.

In playing a leading role in developing the RAF Regiment Museum throughout the seventies and eighties, Group Captain Batt also assisted in the preparation and marketing of the Regiment Short History publication.

In July 1989, Group Captain Batt joined the Overseas Department of the National & International HQ of St John Ambulance in London. As Deputy Director Overseas Relations he has travelled widely, visiting St John organisations throughout the Commonwealth, and specialises in fact-finding missions, planning regional seminars and co-ordinating the provision and control of project funding.



**Group Captain Kingsley Mayne Oliver MA**

Born Durban, South Africa, 1928

Educated: Kearsney College & University of Natal  
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

Royal Air Force Staff College

Joint Services Staff College

Open University

University of London

Commissioned into RAF Regiment 1949. RAF Regiment units in UK, Germany & Middle East, RAF Regiment (Malaya) & Aden Protectorate Levies, Instructor at RAF

Regiment LAA Gunnery School, RAF Regiment Depot and RAF College Cranwell. Staff appointments at HQ FEAF, HQ Fighter Command, HQ RAF Germany and MOD. Commandant RAF Regiment Depot, Deputy Director RAF Regiment. PVR 1978. British Aerospace Dynamics Group (Rapier Programme). Chief Executive, Worshipful Company of Saddlers. Finally retired 1994 (but still has various part-time interests & activities!). Author of RAF Regiment History (1970).

**Minutes of the Ninth Annual General Meeting of the  
Society held in the Royal Air Force Club on Monday  
12th June 1995**

Present: Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey (in the Chair) and 63 other members.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from (in alphabetical order): AM Sir Roy Austen-Smith, AVM Betts, AVM Black, Sqn Ldr Blair, Air Cdre Brown, Mr Bunce, Mr Carter, Rt Hon Sir Frank Cooper, AM Sir Patrick Dunn, Lady Humphrey, Lt Col Lacey-Johnson, Cdr Montgomery, Mr Rawlins and Sir Thomas Risk.

**Chairman's Report**

The Chairman welcomed all present and said there would be time for questions and discussion about the Society generally when the formal business of the Meeting was complete. He announced that the title of the Society's main publication had been changed from 'Proceedings' to 'Journal' to reflect its widening scope, and he appealed for photographs of special historical interest to be donated to the Society.

The Chairman reported that the year just ended had been something of a watershed for the Society with the ending of the Bracknell Series of Second World War 50th Anniversary Seminars. Annually from 1990 the seminars had looked successively at the major campaigns fought by the Service, culminating this year with 'The Far East Air War'. It was appropriate that this theatre should be the culmination of the series as the Far East war, with its testing climatic conditions, mountains, jungle and vast distances combining with a ruthless enemy to produce a campaign whose privations and achievements were scarcely comprehended by the majority of Europeans. The Anniversary of VE-Day showed that the British people understood the historic importance of the contribution their armed services had made to final victory. He hoped that VJ-Day would receive the same public support. Air Cdre Probert had had some encouraging letters after his talk on the 'Today' programme, all good for the Society.

Though the Anniversary seminars were over, the strong connection with Bracknell would continue, but the Society was on its mettle to suggest subjects which would not only satisfy our members and make a contribution to Royal Air Force history but also contain some lessons from the past on which present and future generations of service men and women

can draw. The topic for next year's Bracknell seminar, on 22nd March, had been agreed as 'Air Intelligence in the Second World War'. October's seminar on 'Air Leadership in War', under the chairmanship of Sir Patrick Hine, promised to be an ideal vehicle for 'lessons from the past'. The coverage would range from the higher direction of war at Allied, Coalition and National command levels to tactical leadership at Theatre and squadron levels in World War II, the Falklands and the Gulf. Also this autumn the Society would hold its first regional seminar, 'Defending Northern Skies' – on the initiative of the Vice-Chairman, Sandy Hunter, in concert with the University of Newcastle. This event had considerable support from the AOC 11 Group and would be welcomed by members in the North. It would also provide good exposure in the academic world.

Looking further afield, the Chairman said that Philip Saxon was working on a seminar on the 'History of Air Navigation' from the beginning of the century to the present day, involving the Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators and the Institute of Navigation. It was a longer term aim of the Society to publish a comprehensive history of air navigation and money had been earmarked for this purpose. The seminar should take place in October 1996.

Over the past nine years the Society had published 14 Journals and 5 hardback books – over 1,500 pages at a modest subscription which also, of course, covered lectures and seminars. This publishing had involved considerable work in transcription, editing, collating, proof-reading and printing, the responsibility of Editor Derek Wood and Publisher Tony Richardson, with Henry Probert overseeing the historical accuracy which was of overwhelming importance. The Chairman then appealed again for any member who felt he had the time and aptitude for correcting proofs to volunteer his services to Henry Probert. He also said that a good publicist would be welcomed on the Executive Committee, while one or two people willing to mastermind discussions or seminars were needed for the Programme Sub-Committee.

Turning to the future of the Society, the Chairman offered his thanks to the more than 200 members who had completed the Questionnaire sent out by Jack Dunham, who had now summarised the results in much detail. The suggestions made by members in their replies were going to be a great help to the Committee. The breakdown of ages of respondents was instructive: under 30 – nil, 30-50 – 31, 50-75 – 150, over 75 – 42. Recently members of the Committee had met with four serving air marshals and the Director of Defence Studies to discuss ways in which Service people might recognise

the value of history in their professional careers. This was a most valuable meeting, generating new ideas and helping to reinforce decisions the Committee had previously taken. As a drive to recruit younger serving members, Sandy Hunter had the Commandant at Cranwell offering a year's free membership of the Society to newly commissioned officers. He had also approached the Air Secretary to ensure that the pack of each officer leaving the Service included the Society's new brochure and a membership application. A copy of this new brochure and membership application, masterminded by Joe Ainsworth, was available to every Member at the meeting to pass on to a non-member. There was therefore much for the Committee to work on, which could be summarised as wider publicity for the Society, more regional events, more lessons from the past and an inexorable move of the programme to include the period since 1945. The cost of implementing these ideas was likely to be higher than at present; he would leave the Society's admirable Treasurer, Desmond Goch, to show how they would be met.

The Chairman reminded Members that two years ago CAS, Sir Michael Graydon, gave the Society a cheque from the RAF Central Fund. This year he had written to emphasise the importance of history in the morale and well-being of the Service. As a follow-up ACAS had not only written in this vein to several 'centres of excellence' within the Service but had also suggested to the Committee topics where a seminar study would be useful to the Royal Air Force today. The Committee would be actioning these ideas, possibly through smaller structured discussion groups.

The Chairman said he had taken some time as he was the spokesman for all the Committee members who individually deserved the Society's considerable thanks. Their reward was a thriving society with an assured future. All knew that to go forward into the 21st Century the Society needed a Chairman from the Royal Air Force of the 1990s. Last year he had said that he would continue through 1995. He had done so but he now believed that this AGM should be the last he would address

### **General Secretary's Report**

The General Secretary (Gp Capt Joe Ainsworth) reported that the Society had continued to recruit new members so that membership for the first time exceeded 600. Highlights of a busy year had been the Membership Questionnaire and a new multi-colour brochure designed, with a major input from the Director of Defence Studies, Gp Capt Andrew Lambert, especially to attract younger serving members. The

Questionnaire, masterminded by the Membership Secretary (Dr Jack Dunham), had been sent to all members and almost 40% had responded. While this was an excellent result it still meant that some 6 out of every 10 members had not replied. To help the Committee realise the aims of the Society it was vital that they knew what members wanted, he therefore urged all members who had not yet responded to do so. More than 1,500 of the new brochures had already been distributed, to stations and units through the good offices of the RAF Club and its representatives, to the Personnel Management Centre, to Cranwell and to individuals. He invited all members at the Meeting to use their sample to recruit a new member.

### **Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer (Desmond Goch) said that the Accountant's Report for the year ending 31st December 1995 showed a smaller, but still healthy, surplus of income over expenditure transferred to reserves. Members should however be aware that the Society faced heavier outlays in the coming years, due to the cost of the new brochure, financial support to the History of Air Navigation and the unknown financial outcome of regional seminars. The reserves were there for just these purposes and he could see no need at present to alter the annual subscription but the need for income stressed the importance of members subscribing by Covenant, the tax refunds thus accruing to the Society were an increasingly valuable source of revenue.

### **Accountant's Report for the year ending 31st December 1994**

The Chairman asked if there were any questions on the Accountant's Report which had been distributed to all members. There being no questions it was proposed by Roy Walker and seconded by Edgar Spridgeon that the Accountant's Report for the year ending 31st December 1994 be approved and adopted. The motion was put to the Meeting and carried unanimously .

### **Appointment of Committee**

The Chairman said that there had been two changes to the Committee during the year. Gp Capt Philip Dacre had resigned on leaving the Service and Gp Capt Andrew Lambert had replaced Gp Capt Neil Taylor as Director of Defence Studies, an ex-officio member. He was sure that members would join him in thanking the departed members of the Committee for their contributions and wishing them well in their new posts. The members of the existing Committee, being eligible, offered themselves for re-election. He asked if there were any other nominations. There were



none and it was proposed by AVM John Herrington and seconded by Talbot Green that the members of the existing Committee be re-appointed to hold office until the end of the AGM in 1996. The motion was put to the Meeting and carried unanimously.

The members of the Committee so appointed were:

Chairman:	Air Marshal Sir Frederick B Sowrey KCB CBE AFC
Vice-Chairman	Air Vice-Marshal A F C Hunter CBE AFC MA LLB
General Secretary:	Group Captain J C Ainsworth CEng MRAS
Membership	Dr Jack Dunham
Secretary:	PhD CPsychol AMRAS
Treasurer:	D Goch Esq FCCA
Members:	Wing Commander A J Brookes BA FRSA RAF *Dr M A Fopp MA FMA FIMgt *Group Captain A P N Lambert MPhil RAF *Group Captain Ian Madelin Air Commodore H A Probert MBE MA A E F Richardson Esq Derek H Wood Esq ARAeS  <i>*Ex-Officio Member</i>

### **Appointment of Accountants**

It was proposed by R J Dixon, seconded by Desmond Goch, that Messrs Pridie Brewster be appointed Accountants to the Society and that the Committee be empowered to fix their remuneration. The motion was put to the Meeting and carried unanimously.

This concluded the formal business of the AGM and the Chairman closed the Meeting at 6.35pm.

The Chairman then asked if members had any questions or observations to put to the Committee.

Philip Saxon pointed out that 1996 would see the 10th Anniversary of the Society and asked if any special celebration was being planned. The Chairman replied that the possibility was being looked at.

Michael Robinson said that he feared that the BBC's main contribution to VJ-Day was likely to be a discussion on the morality of the use of the

atom bomb. The Chairman said the Society would do all it could to ensure there was balanced coverage.

K Mead said that the *Naval Review* carried advertisements and suggested that the Society's Journal should do the same. The General Secretary replied that, due to the size of the Society's membership, it had proved impossible to attract advertisers.

Reg Cook asked if the Society would be represented at the celebration of Operation Manna in the Club next day. The Chairman said that the Society was represented where an invitation had been extended.

Alan Pollock commended the American idea of linking the generations through 'Gathering of Eagles' events. He thought that the Society should hold five self-financing events a year spread round RAF Stations where serving personnel could meet veterans. The Chairman replied that the idea was attractive and would be studied.

AVM Nigel Baldwin asked if brochures could be sent out with the Staff College *Hawk* magazine. The Chairman replied that he liked the idea and the committee would look at the cost involved.

## **Introduction to the Speaker by the Chairman:**

### **Group Captain Ian Madelin**

In this company the speaker for tonight's annual lecture needs no introduction, but I am going to give him one anyway, for you do not know the half of it. Denis Richards has devoted the largest part of a life's work to recording the history of the Royal Air Force. From 1942 he was the Senior Narrator in the Air Historical Branch, and leaving aside the narratives which he did not write himself (and you can tell the ones he did because they are not only authoritative but extremely literate) he had a hand in nearly all those timeless narratives which are now in the Public Record Office. They are primary sources and will still be there as primary sources in five hundred years' time. Straight after the war Denis co-authored the three-volume official history of the RAF 1939/45; it was revised in 1970 and last year a new, handsome, slip-cased edition appeared. In 1977 he published his biography of Lord Portal, still today the only study of the greatest of the wartime Chiefs of Staff. In 1989, at an age when I guess most authors have long since given up, he co-authored *The Jubilee History of the Battle of Britain*, and if that were not enough last year he published *The Hardest Victory – Bomber Command in the Second World War*. It was a book, Denis told me, that he just had to write. In 1990 Her Majesty awarded Denis the OBE for services to the writing of Royal Air Force history; that citation, I suggest, is unique and likely to remain so. It is characteristic of Denis to say that he felt the award was in nature of encouragement to all who were working in the same field. That comes down to almost the same thing, for most of the serious practitioners in the field have come under Denis's tutelage at some time or another. Even so when the Honours List was published Denis could not resist going to the telephone and phoning his sister to tell her all about it. Sisters, of course, have to be kept in their place so she listened and said 'go on, tell the other one!' A prophet may be without honour in his own family but Denis is not without honour in this one.

## Writing RAF History\*

### Denis Richards OBE

I see that the title announced for my talk is ‘The Writing of RAF History’, and it is indeed probable that I agreed to speak on just that. But I somehow remembered the title as ‘Writing RAF History’, and there is a subtle difference. ‘The Writing of RAF History’ suggests mainly a dissertation on how to do it, which I don’t think I could sustain for a whole lecture. ‘Writing RAF History’ covers wider ground and enables me to bring in lots of personal reminiscence, which is much easier.

I must first point out that, until I came along, being an official RAF historian had been no passport to a long life. The first, the Oxford don Sir Walter Raleigh, died of a fever while visiting units in the Middle East. The second, H A Jones, disappeared on a trans-Atlantic flight. The third, Philip Guedalla, succumbed from pneumonia after being compelled to spend several hours in a damp shelter during a raid alert at an American air base. The fourth, Hilary Saunders, died prematurely from trouble exacerbated by high flights in unpressurised aircraft. The fifth you see before you – the first, by dint of cunning and good fortune, to break the malign spell.

RAF official history began extremely well with Sir Walter Raleigh’s Volume One of *The War in the Air*. Sir Walter was a most gifted writer who was able to endow his text with an inspirational quality. He also had a keen eye for essentials – it is reported that once, when a researcher provided him with over-lengthy material, he gazed at him reproachfully and said: ‘I ask for cream, and you bring me a cow.’ But because he was dealing with the initial conquest of the air and with only a very limited scale of operations his task was much easier than that of his successor, H A Jones, who wrote the other five volumes. No one, I think, would say that Jones’s work is equal in literary merit to Raleigh’s, but it is a thoroughly skilful and professional account, and the whole history is a great credit to those who planned and wrote it.

For the purpose of producing *The War in the Air* and later a so-called ‘brief History’ as an ‘Air Publication’ for Service use, the Air Ministry established the Air Historical Branch (AHB). With the completion of the histories this was wound up, but reactivated after the outbreak of the Second World War.

What then happened I think I can best describe by recounting my own personal experience, before ending with a few words on more serious

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matters such as sources and technical problems.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 I was the Senior History and English Master at a public school, in a reserved occupation, and had recently published a successful history of Modern Europe. I remember remarking to a colleague that there were only two jobs I would really like to do during the war. One was to study, concurrently with the development of the military situation, the best possible terms for peace. The other was to write the wartime history of the RAF. So the will was there from the start.

Naturally no-one asked me to undertake either of these tasks, and in due course the age of reservation of schoolmasters was very properly raised. For my service I opted for the RAF, and being too old to be considered for a pilot I was persuaded to train as a wireless operator. I soon found this so boring that I applied to be remustered as an observer. From any danger that I might ultimately have navigated a good set of chaps to disaster I was saved by the arrival at my station, in the autumn of 1941, of a mysterious signal. It summoned A C Plonk 121, Richards, D G to report at 1500 hours in two days' time to Room 504 (or whatever) in Adastral House.

No signal summoning an airman by name to the Air Ministry had ever arrived at the station before, and the Station Commander, of whose existence I had previously been unaware, took a dim view of the matter. He assumed that I had been complaining about conditions on his station, and sent me off to London with dire warnings of what might befall me if I had stepped out of line.

On arrival at Adastral House I found to my astonishment that a distinguished panel had been assembled to interview me and others for the post of 'Narrator' in the newly revived Air Historical Branch. The idea was that this chosen individual should write 'preliminary narratives' describing recent and current RAF operations. These were to be partly for the immediate enlightenment of the Air Staff and partly for the more distant benefit of the official historians who would be appointed after the war. Apparently there was already one such narrator, a squadron leader, and they wanted another. Almost unable to believe my ears as this tale unfolded, I sold myself as never before or since, and got the job. Since there were few precedents for immediate promotion from AC2 to squadron leader, and since I would be required to interview senior officers without being on too much 'yes, sir' and 'no, sir' terms, the panel thought it best that I should revert to being a civilian.

The news of this outcome of my visit to Adastral House was received with great relief by my Station Commander who became quite human, and

with a mixture of pleasure and astonishment by my former academic colleagues. ‘You mean to say,’ one of them remarked to me incredulously, ‘that out of about half a million airmen the Air Ministry has actually been able to pinpoint someone like you to do this job? You know...I think we’re going to win this war!’

My first task in the Historical Branch was to write a narrative on the 1940 campaign in France and the Low Countries. I had barely begun when I was temporarily assigned to the recently superseded Commander-in-Chief from the Far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, to help him write his Despatch. He was a fine old boy, quite shrewd, and a demon worker: no matter how early I arrived at our office, or how late I left, he was always there before and after me. Every day he took me out to lunch, usually at the Army and Navy Club the ‘Rag’ – so swiftly was I moving *de bas en haut*. I wrote one section of his despatch but my main service to him, of which I trust he was never aware, was to improve his punctuation. The unobtrusive addition of the odd dot above a comma, to form a semi-colon, did wonders for his sentence structure.

Back on the France 1940 narrative, I found that the main documentation, or such of it as had not been dumped into the Channel during the evacuation, had been deposited in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. In addition to ‘dead’, but historically important files from various headquarters, all the Forms 540 and 541, the Operations Record Books or ‘ORBs’ of the Commands, Groups, Wings, Squadrons, Stations and other units had been sent there for safe preservation. Also at Aberystwyth, to which I moved, I found the other narrator, the squadron leader, who with my arrival became dubbed the Senior Narrator. Throughout the latter part of 1942, I toiled at a desk between book-stacks on the first floor of the National Library, frequently raising my head to gaze through the window for inspiration from the Welsh hills, which from time to time were unobscured by rain. An incidental pleasure was that I was flanked on both sides by famous paintings piled against the book-stacks, priceless masterpieces of French impressionism, evacuated like the Forms 540, to escape the bombing.

Another incidental diversion at this time was overhearing the comments of a military historian, Captain Wynn, who occupied the book-stack niche next to mine. He worked for the Cabinet Historical Section, which had taken over Army history from the War Office after some historiographical fiasco in connection with the Boer War. This Historical Section had started narratives on the recently military campaigns, but it was also still engaged

on the Official History of World War I. Wynn was working on this, and covering the Passchendaele campaign of 1917. As he contemplated the enormous toll of casualties for such limited advances, he groaned aloud, and cried out to Heaven about the follies of the High Command. When his volume finally appeared in print, I was accordingly expecting an exposé rare in official military history. It proved to be nothing of the sort. The text had passed through the skilled hands of the editor of the whole series, Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds.

Towards the end of 1942 AHB acquired its third narrator, my former pupil, Cecil James. He had been invalided home from the Far East just in time to avoid going into the Japanese bag. By that time I had finished with France and started on the Battle of Britain, but with the arrival of Cecil that became his subject and I moved on to the Middle East. As soon as hostilities ceased in North Africa in May 1943 I was accordingly sent out there to familiarise myself with the terrain, interview leading personalities, and check that records were being properly maintained and preserved. For this last purpose we produced and distributed yellow stick-on labels bearing some such words as 'Historical Record Permanent Preservation – Return to AHB when action finished'. Records Officers in the units were instructed to attach these to the most important files at the annual file 'boarding', or when headquarters were moved or disbanded.

I travelled for about three months round the Middle East and across the length and breadth of North Africa, wearing now for ease of passage the uniform of a squadron leader. Tedder at Algiers and Sholto Douglas in Cairo both proved particularly helpful, the latter telling me to write out for his signature whatever form of CinC's letter I needed to secure unrestricted access to units, commanders, documents and transport. He told me I could have everything except a private aircraft. At Malta I was able to interview the Governor. Lord Gort whom I found still worried about his disregard of Churchill's order in May 1940 to march the British Expeditionary Force south across the path of the advancing German Panzers. I spent some time with the Malta AOC, Keith Park, who, when he heard from someone that I was to interview the Governor later that day, had me Tannoyed all over the island so that he could see me and brief me first.

I was also in time to catch up with the operations in Sicily. There I visited Broadhurst and some of his Desert Air Force squadrons and later stayed at 'Mary' Coningham's Tactical Air Force HQ. My brief sojourn there was extremely instructive. I had always imagined that during major operations the local air commander would be up to his eyes in business, but

in Sicily I discovered that campaigns can be conducted in a more relaxed fashion. At the week-ends Coningham flew off to Tunisia to a villa he had acquired at Hammamet, and during the weekday mornings he would spend a couple of hours teaching General Alexander how to fly. He kindly allowed me to sit in on his conferences, which took up only an hour or two each day. There I observed him dealing expeditiously with the matters brought before him by his Senior Air Staff Officer, Teddy Hudlestone, who seemed a far busier man.

On returning from Sicily I found that the Senior Narrator, who was not in fact frightfully good, had been moved on, and that I was to have his post. I reflected on this, and on our puny establishment of three Narrators, and decided to write a paper indicating what I thought was necessary if our job was to be properly done. The paper was for my boss, H A Jones's former assistant, John Nerney, who was not only the head of the Air Historical Branch, with its separate narrative and record-collecting sections, but also controlled about five Air Ministry libraries and was accumulating objects, from aircraft downwards, to form the nucleus of the future RAF Museum.

My paper drew attention to the fact that the Cabinet had laid down a time-schedule for the Official Histories, to obviate the kind of situation where the military were still working on World War I when World War II broke out. (This time-lag, incidentally, was far surpassed by the French official historians, who in 1939 were still busy on the Franco-Prussian War). The Cabinet's intention was that a 'popular' official history of each Service should appear within two or three years of the end of hostilities, and that a full length Official History of a more academic kind, on an inter-Service basis, should appear within ten years. My paper pointed out that in a year's work our three Narrators had covered only certain aspects of the months April to October 1940, and that some far bigger outfit was required if the Cabinet's wishes were to be met. I suggested that the situation required a narrative not only for every land-air campaign and for the more general operations of Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands, but also for each important specialised subject, such as aircraft development, armament, radar, aircrew training, maintenance and the WAAF. I suggested that each narrative – about 25 in all – called for a squadron leader or civilian equivalent as a narrator, with a flight lieutenant or civilian equivalent as a Research Assistant. In addition, appropriate secretarial and cartographical resources should be provided. All told, I estimated that about 70 skilled people, instead of three, would be needed if anything reasonably comprehensive and authoritative were to be produced within the desired



time-scale.

I can still see John Nerney reading this paper in my presence, then looking at me, rocking back in his chair, and roaring with laughter. The idea that he should ask for about 50 squadron leaders and flight-lieutenants for historical work in the middle of a war struck him as inexpressibly funny. Nevertheless, after thought, this is precisely what he did. And not only did he ask – he got.

So, in the latter part of 1943 – by which date we had moved back to London, in good time for the ‘Little Blitz’, the doodle-bugs and the rockets – I found myself as Senior Narrator in charge of an ever-increasing team as John Nerney laid his hands on more and more suitable bodies, nearly all in uniform. Group captains, even an air officer, were roped in to join my team. (For the air officer, incidentally, the Ministry of Works felt it incumbent to provide a room and carpet far superior to my own as head of the section. But as he turned out to be no good at the job, we passed him on, and I was able to take over his room – and the carpet). With all this expansion I became far too busy to write myself, but I briefed the new boys and edited all the output. Together we produced most of the 70-odd volumes of narratives which are now held in the PRO and are an essential mining ground for air historians. Their quality naturally varies, but the general level of the narrative staff was extremely high. After the war three of them were appointed to major University history professorships –at Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester – and another three won seats in the Commons at the election of 1945.

Much of this narrative writing continued for long after the war. And although the Cabinet had wanted popular official histories to be produced within 2-3 years of the end of hostilities, almost that time elapsed before anyone got down to appointing the authors. Curiously enough there was great competition between the three Services for Arthur Bryant, that colourfully patriotic historian whom Andrew Roberts has recently shown to have been an appeaser as late as 1940. The Navy – bad luck for them – got Bryant. He had a couple of naval commanders devilling for him for two or three years, but he was too busy, and never delivered: the Navy got no ‘popular’ Official History. The Army ultimately got five or six volumes, mainly by well-known writers like Ian Hay, Christopher Buckley and Eric Linklater. The RAF, as you perhaps know, got three volumes, *Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, which has just been re-issued by HMSO in a very handsome format. It was a joint effort: I wrote the first volume and a half, Hilary St George Saunders wrote the second volume and a half, and

together, line by line, we wrote the last chapter as our joint final assessment.

You may be interested in some details of the gestation of this work. Hilary Saunders was the Librarian of the House of Commons and a very well-known factual author who also wrote, under pseudonyms, popular historical and detective novels. He had been employed by the Air Ministry to write some notably successful booklets during the war; for the one on the Battle of Britain, which sold six million copies, he was paid £50 – and later he had been attached to Leigh-Mallory as a kind of historical reporter for ‘Overlord’. (He went round in an officer’s uniform without insignia of rank, but wearing a cap bearing a badge with the letters SD. Officially these stood for Special Duties but according to Hilary for Sewage Disposal). When Bryant opted for the Navy, the Air Ministry’s next choice fell on Hilary. Hilary, however, proved difficult. Instead of a fixed fee and publication by the Stationery Office, as laid down for all official histories at that time, he demanded royalties and publication by the Oxford University Press. In this situation the Air Ministry, on Nerney’s recommendation, then invited me, and I accepted – whereupon Hilary at once withdrew his objections and said he would do it himself after all. Nobly the Air Ministry stuck with me, but, not wishing to spend too long on the work, and concerned mainly to do a little real historical writing after all the preliminary ‘narrating’, I offered to share the task with Hilary. Not unwisely, I stipulated that I should cover the first, and not the second-half of the war. I knew that the preliminary narratives were virtually complete for the earlier period, and that they would greatly ease the quest for authenticity.

Shortly after I began to write my history I felt obliged to make a bit of history happen. Confronting me was the matter of the German losses in the Battle of Britain. The Air Ministry had consistently endorsed the figures announced at the time by Fighter Command, including the record ‘bags’ – 182 on 15th August 1940 and 185 on 15th September (which for that reason was chosen as Battle of Britain Day). But German documents obtained by the enemy documents section of AHB told a very different story for these days of high scoring. They showed that the *Luftwaffe* lost 72, not 182, on 15th August, and 56, not 185, on 15th September. And later research has added, for those two days, only another seven aircraft.

The Air Intelligence Directorate at the Air Ministry had in fact known ever since 1940 that the figures of 182 and 185 were unlikely to be accurate. They had known because they had counted up the crashed

German aircraft each day, added the number of German aircraft from which distress calls were heard, added a further proportion for probable crashes on landing and still not been able to make the total German casualties more than 40-50 on any given day. Clearly the German figures, which were based on demands for replacement aircraft, were more accurate than the accepted British ones, and I must use them in my history. But I didn't want my book to attract attention for a sensational and disappointing disclosure rather than for its other qualities. Moreover I felt sure that these true figures were bound to be revealed from some other source before my book could be published, and that the Air Ministry would be vastly discredited if it became known that the figures had been in its possession for some time but had never been made public. So I wrote a note, through the Head of AHB and the Directorate of Intelligence, outlining the situation, and saying that I thought it essential, for reputation's sake, that the Ministry itself should release the figures rather than have them publicised from an outside source. The clincher was in my last sentence – to the effect that the Americans also had copies of these German documents in Washington, and might presumably release them at any time. The response was swift. Two days later the Secretary of State for Air, Philip Noel-Baker, rose in the House of Commons to announce the revised figures of German losses in the Battle of Britain.

To assist us in our job, Hilary and I asked for, and were given, all we wanted. We had a wing-commander each as a staff officer-cum-research assistant, a shorthand-typist each, a civil servant executive officer between us to handle administration, and the full co-operation of the AHB narrative, records, and cartographical branches. We also enjoyed generous travel facilities, and at an early stage set off on journeys to view theatres of war with which we were unfamiliar. Hilary, for instance, went to Malaya and Burma, and I went to Norway and other parts of Europe. We finished our three volumes in just over two years, on target, but the Air Ministry and the Stationery Office then took another four years to approve and publish them. The new CAS, Sir John Slessor, had expressed a particular wish to see the typescript and it sat in his office, presumably unread, for about two of the four years.

To complete the personal side of this talk. After nearly eight years devoted to RAF history I became briefly an established administrator in the Air Ministry. I found my job, mainly concerned with married quarters, squatters and AOC's residences, so frustrating that within a year I decided to revert to education. For fifteen years I was Principal of the adult

education centre Morley College, and then for four years Longman Fellow in History in the University of Sussex. During these years my only writings concerning the RAF were on the rare occasions when I was asked for a book review or an article.

I was sounded out, presumably among others, about writing the official biography of Lord Trenchard, but was advised by my educational publishers that they could keep me more gainfully employed. In later years, as I wrote about the RAF again, I rather regretted the fact that the ‘Father of the RAF’ – a term he hated – had escaped my biographical attentions.

It was not until the early 1970s, after I had given up any regular post, that I again became involved in writing RAF history – though I had, of course, always maintained an interest in it, particularly through my friendships in AHB. On the death of the wartime CAS, Lord Portal, in 1971, Sir Harald Peake and others of his former colleagues were keen that an official biography should be written and the then Head of AHB, Teddy Haslam, suggested my name. The work took me four years, even though I had a skilled research assistant, thanks to Sir Harald Peake’s generosity, for at least half this time. It appeared in 1979, with Lord Mountbatten and Sir George Edwards kindly commending it to a large launching party at the Dorchester, also paid for by Sir Harald Peake.

*Portal of Hungerford* had no great sales, bearing out what my publishers had said about the Trenchard project, but it had good notices and led to a number of requests for articles on RAF subjects, including brief notices of leading air commanders for the Dictionary of National Biography. It also led to my editor at its publishers, the naval historian and former fighter pilot Richard Hough, asking me to collaborate with him on a new history of the Battle of Britain for the Jubilee of 1990. This sold extremely well and our publisher at Hodder’s asked me to write another RAF history on a subject of my choice. I had long felt that the work of Bomber Command in the war had been seriously undervalued in recent years, and so I tried to paint what I thought was a more accurate and balanced picture. It appeared last autumn as *The Hardest Victory – RAF Bomber Command in the Second World War*, and as it took me three years to write and I am no longer, as they say, ‘as young as I was’, I am unlikely to venture any further lengthy forays into RAF history.

So much for the personal story. Now for some general points. First, the sources. The main depository for the RAF’s historically important documents is of course the Public Record Office at Kew, but there are also extensive collections in the RAF Museum (where many airmen have

lodged their papers), the Imperial War Museum, and the Air Historical Branch. The two Museums, and particularly the Imperial War Museum, are also the best sources for RAF photographs – private agencies are much dearer. The Imperial War Museum, too, holds photocopies, many now fading, of the *Luftwaffe* documents captured at the end of the war.

For the Public Record Office there are two useful guides. For the World War II records as a whole there is John D Cantwell: *The Second World War: a Guide to Documents in the Public Record Office* (HMSO, £10.95) and for the RAF in particular there is the recently published *RAF Records in the Public Record Office* (HMSO, £8.95).

To those unfamiliar with the Record Office at Kew and contemplating a first visit I would say: ‘Allow plenty of time.’ Do not be deceived by the ease with which you can park your car – everything else will be infinitely more difficult. You will be allowed to order up to six files at one go, but these will be handed out to you only one at a time, so you will be constantly queuing up at the counter to get another. If you can, do your research there in the winter when there are fewer eager beavers from across the Atlantic to swell the queues.

Primary sources abound in the PRO at all levels from Cabinet, Defence Committee, and Chiefs of Staff Committee downwards to the squadron or other unit Operations Record Books (The squadron ORBs, by the way, are the easiest thing to consult nowadays, because the Forms 540 can be summoned up on screen). The ORBs of the main Commands and Groups are of course massive affairs, with multi-volume appendices. But for every Command and many of the Directorates there are also the historically important files, often running into hundreds. To give an idea of the scale of the material held, here are the numbers of ‘pieces’ (ie files, folders, boxes or bound volumes – *not* individual papers) held in some of the main categories

Air Ministry registered correspondence	approx 4,800
Air Ministry unregistered papers	5,200
Chief of the Air Staff	1,100
Overseas Commands	7,000
Coastal Command	725
Fighter Command	900
Bomber Command	3,400
Command Operation Record Books	1,625
Station Operation Record Books	1,450
Squadron Operation Record Books	2,500

Do not be surprised at the scale of this documentation. There is the well-known story of the scholar who intended to write a history of the Board of Trade. He visited the PRO and found that the relevant files occupied 12 miles of shelving.

Official records, however, are only a part of the source material for RAF history. There are also all the unofficial or personal ones. Obvious examples of these are the books by participants, such as Churchill's war history, Harris's *Bomber Offensive*, Tedder's *With Prejudice*, Slessor's *The Central Blue*, Cheshire's *Bomber Pilot* and Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead*. There must be at least 200 of these on World War II which give valuable insights or information.

But unpublished material can be still more valuable because it has probably not been used before and therefore comes all the fresher. The problem here is how to find or tap it, and personally I have found that the best ways are through the press or Service organisations. Before Hilary and I wrote *Royal Air Force 1939-1945* we got Sir Philip Joubert, who was then Director of Public Relations, to send a letter to the main newspapers appealing for personal reminiscences, and this produced hundreds of replies from which we were able to make some very effective quotations. Similarly, when Richard Hough and I wrote our Battle of Britain book we circulated a questionnaire to all members of the Battle of Britain Fighter Association which yielded invaluable material. I did the same again with my *Hardest Victory*, this time using the good offices of the Bomber Command Association. I received over 300 replies, varying in length from simple answers to the questionnaire to the enclosure of complete texts of unpublished works.

A further valuable source of information is, of course, the interview. My own interviews with people like Tedder and Harris and Dowding helped me immeasurably, not from any new information they imparted, but from the impressions of their characters I was able to form by meeting them in the flesh. I would warn, however, that interviewing tends to be a time consuming process. The questions have to be properly prepared, there is often travel involved, perhaps a meal, and then the writing up afterwards or transcription from a tape-recorder and picking out the nuggets from the dross. Personally I used to reckon that a major interview involved two days' work.

So much for sources. Now a final word about one or two problems. A main one is certainly the plethora of documentary material which may or may not turn out to be relevant or useful, but which needs to be

investigated. In 1946, to my positive knowledge, the Air Historical Branch alone held some 500 tons of *selected* RAF documents, as well as 50 tons of *Luftwaffe* documents. It follows that it is usually much easier to write the history of a short episode, like the raid on the German dams, or of a single commander, than it is to write the history of an extended campaign, like the Battle of the Atlantic or the bomber offensive against Germany.

A different problem is the difficulty, in some cases, of arriving at a really accurate picture or assessment. I have already mentioned the disparity in figures of the German losses in the Battle of Britain, but this disparity was as nothing compared with that of the American bomber crews' claims, and the enemy's admissions, in the USAAF's operations over Germany. Exact accuracy of figures, however, is not of the highest importance if the end-result is clear. The great difficulty arises when there is an enormous amount of material to digest, as with the bomber offensive, but there is still uncertainty and controversy about the end-result. For any given bombing operation crews' reports can give one picture, post-raid reconnaissance another, later intelligence a third, and enemy records (if available) a fourth.

The greatest problem of all, however, with an extended history covering several years, is one which many academic historians scarcely face at all, and it applies to all extended histories, not only that of the RAF. It is to make the book readable by more than a very restricted audience of those with a specialised or professional interest in the subject. Most of the official records are in themselves as dry as dust, and poring over them for years on end can have a deadly influence on a writer's style. This is why it is so necessary to leaven the basic account with incidents which remind the reader, and thereby keep him awake, that the war is being fought, not only in the planning and organisation and technical advances, but with human flesh and blood. Sentence-structure, too, is all-important. I encountered an RAF history the other day with, on a very early page, a sentence over twenty lines long – a sure promoter for the drooping eyelid. If the sentences are skilfully varied in length, eschew the passive tense, employ the occasional colourful phrase, and maintain a good narrative pulse, there is some chance that the work may be read by more than a limited coterie of specialists.

I should like to conclude with a final observation. I must have spent nearly 20 years of my working life on RAF history. I could not have done that had I not early conceived, and throughout been sustained by the most profound respect and admiration for the Service and its achievements.

## **Discussion Period:**

### **Sir Frederick Sowrey**

One cannot but be full of admiration for the booklets that appeared during the war. How was it, in times when every kind of information – however small – was thought to be of value to the enemy, that the government could be persuaded to release the sort of information which, through reading between the lines, might have been of some advantage to the enemy?

### **Denis Richards**

I do not know the official answer, but the wartime DPR did a magnificent job in producing these booklets which were well printed and sold cheaply by HMSO; the Air Ministry seemed to take the view that the more the public knew about the RAF in general the better. They didn't give away secrets but you could certainly study the whole pattern of operations from them. It was a deliberate and very enlightened policy.

### **Richard Bateson**

I believe the Ministry of Aircraft Production had a rival set-up to AHB run by Professor Postan. Can you tell us anything about it?

### **Denis Richards**

I do not know what size it was, but I am sure it was much smaller than AHB. Certainly Professor Postan and his assistant (later his wife) looked after it – I remember meeting them in about 1942/3 – but I think they largely ran it by themselves.

### **Air Commodore Probert**

At what point did you first suspect the existence of ULTRA? Did you ever have any clue about that particular intelligence break-through before Winterbottom broke the story?

### **Denis Richards**

We were not told about ULTRA in general when we were writing the narratives during the war but Hilary Saunders and I were briefed about it before we wrote the official history, and were given a potted history. We knew from time to time that something had come from those sources but were not allowed to mention the word. But we did know about it and its most significant achievements when we wrote those three volumes.

### **Humphrey Wynn**

If you were to embark on another of your books about the RAF what



great theme – in terms of either campaign or biography – would you choose from the years since the end of the Second World War?

### **Denis Richards**

This is a question of which I should like notice. I would not really like to commit myself on this – and fortunately don't have to.

### **Group Captain Madelin**

The questioner, Humphrey Wynn, is one of those historical authors whom I mention as having been under Denis's tutelage. In fact he still feels himself to some extent under that tutelage, for his next book, the History of Transport Command, is due out later this year, and he is now checking what his next subject should be.

### **Air Vice-Marshal Robinson**

When I come to read your book *The Hardest Victory* I shall be very interested to see where you start, ie how long before 1939. When working in the PRO I came to appreciate much more than I had before the extraordinary hill that the bomber force had to climb before it could become efficient – something that has not been made as clear as it might have been. I am thinking, for example, of the CinC's report that his force in 1937 was deplorably inefficient. Where do you start in providing the perspective? It seems to me that there is an opportunity in the forthcoming film about Bomber Command to show that its achievements came in spite of so many initial shortcomings having to be overcome.

### **Denis Richards**

I do not think the achievements came in spite of what was planned; there had to be continual readjustment in order to get better results, which they did. One cannot say that the scientific advance would have been there in 1938 if the staffs had been brighter. War is a forcing house which makes resources available that were not available before. It seems to me they made quite extraordinary progress, gearing it to administrative and operational efficiency. The Germans made even greater technical progress but never geared it to producing an all-round powerful air force.

### **Bill Beaumont**

There now must be a flood of young people looking through masses of papers that have been left to them and wondering what to do with them; they are not qualified to be editors or selectors. Is any advice being offered on how to deal with the personal papers of those who served in the RAF and the other services? It seems to me there is a sociological history of the

RAF to be written.

### **Denis Richards**

There have been touches of this in various books but it has not been done deeply. On the disposal of documents both the RAF Museum and the Imperial War Museum certainly welcome such material though they do not promise to accept everything.

### **Air Vice-Marshal Price**

You referred earlier to the experience of the Germans. One of the books that influenced me throughout my RAF career was *The Rise and Fall of the German Air Force*. It indicated where they had been successful and it showed mistakes which should be avoided: a most valuable book which came out in a remarkably short time. Could you say anything about the team which put it together?

### **Denis Richards**

It came out as an Air Publication, not available to the general public. Then more recently it has been made available openly. It was produced by the Director of Intelligence under Wing Commander Asher Lee. He and his team in AI3b were very much on the ball and produced a remarkable book. (*Editorial note: the book was published on the open market by Arms and Armour Press in 1983 with a new introduction written by Henry Probert, then Head of AHB*)

### **Cecil James**

As another of Denis's former pupils who never misses an opportunity to have a go, may I follow the last point? Not the least valuable of our Society's activities in relation to RAF history have been the contributions of the German historian, Dr Horst Boog. For a comprehensive history of any Service to be written one has to know how things looked from the other side. One also needs to have the Allied perspective – there are certain aspects of wartime and post-war history which one cannot understand fully without knowing what the Americans were doing but not necessarily saying to us.

**AIR CHIEF MARSHAL  
SIR EDMUND HUDLESTON**

**Address by Air Chief Marshal  
Sir Frederick Rosier GCB CBE DSO**

I first met the then Air Vice-Marshal Hudleston in November 1944 when he arrived in Antwerp to take over No. 84 Group in the Tactical Air Force. I served under him as Group Captain Operations and later as Senior Air Staff Officer until early 1946, and for the next 49 years we remained close friends.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Edmund Hudleston GCB CBE, four times mentioned in dispatches and the recipient of many foreign honours was born in Perth, W Australia on 30th December 1908, the son of the Archdeacon of Perth. Educated at Guildford School where he did well at studies and games, he began to take an interest in flying and in 1927 he became a Cranwell cadet.

His official record shows that his flying ability was exceptional, general ability superior, conduct exemplary; and that he was an outstanding cadet, an Under Officer whose work and games maintained a standard of all round excellence. A promising beginning to a career in the Service.

Fourteen months after leaving, having had a spell in a fighter squadron and completed a course at the Central Flying School, he was back at Cranwell, instructing for nearly two years. Then another course before a four year posting as an armament specialist to India, first in Kohat and then Risalpur.

In 1936 he was mentioned in dispatches for valuable services on the North West Frontier, and in that same year and to the surprise and astonishment of his fellow officers at Risalpur, he returned from leave in Kashmir with a wife – a vivacious Australian née Nancye Davis. The story went that he had pursued her with vigour.

After staff college in 1938 he spent two years in Turkey as an advisor to their air force before moving on to HQ Middle East. It was the start of three and a half years on air staff duties. He served under Tedder both there and in the Mediterranean Air Command before taking up the post of Senior Air Staff Officer in No 1 Tactical Air Force, which for a time was commanded by his old Cranwell CO, Air Marshal ‘Mary’ Coningham. He had been involved in the planning of the Sicily campaign and the landings at Salerno, Anzio and the South of France, and had established a reputation as a brilliant, unflappable and respected staff officer.

It was, therefore, not surprising that he was brought back from Italy to serve again under Coningham: this time as the head of 84 Group with the rank of air vice-marshal. It was his first command.

The 30+ Polish, French, Norwegian, Belgian, Dutch and RAF squadrons of fighter bombers and reconnaissance aircraft in the Group were divided into Wings commanded by group captains of vast operational experience. And here in charge was a young air vice-marshal, barely 36, with no operational flying experience. But it did not take long to appreciate his remarkable knowledge of tactical operations and to warm to his personal qualities. I well remember two of his early initiatives – his success in convincing the Canadian Army, which we supported, that operations should be jointly planned; and his policy that, for tasks other than routine, wings should participate in the planning. The results were increased operational effectiveness and a build-up of trust and confidence. Within the headquarters itself he endeared himself to the staff: approachable, unassuming, courteous, not afraid of delegating and, above all, knowing his job.

Early in 1946 he left Germany to go to the IDC, and I, also posted, travelled back with him by train and boat. En route he opened a bottle of champagne saying ‘Now, Fred, we go back to austerity’ and so we did.

After IDC he went from one important job to another:-

Head of the UK Military Delegation to the Western Union.

AOC No 1 Group Bomber Command.

Deputy Chief of Staff Plans at SHAPE where the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, is reported to have said of him that he was the best staff officer of any nation he had had serve under him at any time.

Then came 3 Group where as AOC he dealt with the introduction of the first of the V-bombers, the Valiant, into the Nuclear Deterrent Force.

In 1957 after nearly two years as the senior RAF instructor at the IDC and a short break in Cyprus as Chief of Staff for the ill-fated Suez operation, he became VCAS. It was the start of four and a half years gruelling, exciting and often frustrating years.

It was a period of escalating equipment costs, reduced defence expenditure and little change in commitments; of the building up of the nuclear deterrent force at the expense of other RAF commands, particularly Fighter; of changing defence policies; of a transition of power from the Service Ministries to the Ministry of Defence; of internecine battles between the Services – and I could go on ... But throughout, this quiet Australian, as he was called by the *Daily Telegraph*, was deeply involved

in doing what he could for the good of the Air Force and, as he believed, for the country. In doing so he displayed his great qualities: hardworking, imaginative, innovative, thoughtful, persistent, formidable in discussion, and with the great gift of being able to get the best out of people. He was also a very human person with a great sense of humour and respected by all, whether for or against him. He never cracked under what must have been at times insupportable pressure.

When it ended he took over Transport Command, perhaps not an impressive reward after such a difficult time, but at least the Command was expanding and re-equipping. From there he moved on to his last appointment from 1964 to 1967 as Commander of the Allied Air Forces in the Central Region of Europe. It was there that he arranged for his badly disfigured Chief of Staff, General Steinhoff, to be operated on by a famous RAF surgeon. As a result Steinhoff was able to close his eyes for the first time since he was burned in a Me262 crash in 1945.

After retirement he did not sit back. He became Appeals Secretary for King Edward VII Hospital (Sister Agnes) and also a Director of the Optics Division of Pilkingtons where he was regarded as outstanding.

He was quite a character and, in his time, a very fine cricketer and squash player. It was always fun to be with him. What other air marshal could you think of who would emerge from the cockpit of a Canberra wearing a Trilby having worn it all the way to Nairobi to help keep the sun off his head; or, as happened soon after VE-Day at a formal lunch at a Fighter Wing in Germany when he ordered 'Draw the curtains, and declare a guest night'. He also told the CO to find a violin for me (which he did) – so that I could accompany the singing.

And I remember him in short sleeves and wearing possibly the same Trilby hat sitting sedately in my service Pullman as it went down the Maalla Straight in Aden, whilst next to the driver sat my Yemeni cook holding a cardboard box out of which (and out of the window) poked the head of a sheep – destined for sacrifice. And I remember too how at the end of the day he would love to relax with a glass or two of whisky. Happy memories.

After 44 years together his wife Nancye died in 1980. They had a son Anthony and daughter Sally.

Some years later he married again – to Brenda Withington, the widow of a colonel. She has been a wonderful wife, acting as his eyes and ears as his sight and hearing deteriorated. She completely devoted herself to him.

Today our thoughts go out to her; to Teddy's children Tony and Sally

and to Eric Grounds who, from early childhood lived with the family and was regarded as part of it.

They and we are now left with the memory of a very great man.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**The RAF and Trade Defence 1919-1945: Constant Endeavour:** By John Buckley. Published by Ryburn Publishing, an imprint of Keele University Press. Price £38.00 (Hardback).

**A Forgotten Offensive: Royal Air Force Coastal Command's Anti-shipping Campaign 1940-1945:** By Christina J M Goulter. Published by Frank Cass & Co Ltd. Price £17.50 (Paperback).

It is a rare coincidence for two books to be published in the same year, in which so much common ground is covered. Although their titles might suggest otherwise, both books deal extensively with the policy issues of the inter-war years which shaped Coastal Command at the outbreak of WWII. Largely similar conclusions are drawn about these years but, inevitably, each author lends different emphasis and colour to the account of events and their consequences. Such is the real charm of reading the two consecutively.

John Buckley, having offered his analysis of the inter-war years, devotes the bulk of his work to a careful account of the Battle of the Atlantic. His handling of anti-shipping operations is brief, by comparison with his detailed description of the U-boat war. Christina Goulter follows an account of the state of maritime aviation at the time of the Armistice with a study, similar to Buckley's, of the policies and actions of the inter-war years. She then describes the progressive achievement by Coastal Command of a formidable anti-shipping capability in the shape of its Strike Wings. In addition, she provides a comprehensive account of the economic and other effects of their operations.

These two books complement each other by their separate focus on two different campaigns: they also cover the same important policy ground with often significantly different emphasis.

John Buckley is almost virulently critical of the Air Staff of the 1920s and '30s, and what he sees as their obsessive preference for the bomber. He may be right in his conclusions and in his analysis of the effects on Coastal Command of giving priority to the bomber and, after Inskip, to fighter defences. However, he does seem rather to over-egg the pudding by his assumptions about what could have been achieved, had Coastal Area and then Coastal Command been given the priority for which he argues.

Buckley's vision of the 'position of great potential' of coastal air power against U-boats at the close of WWI seems not entirely to take into account the technology of the day, nor the post-war economic and defence

environment which so affected all military procurement. He appears almost to argue that given only proper Air Staff priorities, problems of navigation, detection, weapons and reach would have been overcome at a stroke. Only the obduracy of the Air Staff, and to a lesser extent the Admiralty by its belief in totally effective protection of shipping by convoy and Asdic, stood in the way of realising that potential. His criticism of the Air Staff is manifold and, in parts, ingenious and even novel. That Blackburn should have produced the Botha or Saro the Lerwick is evidence in his eyes of a culpable failure to allocate the best industrial resources to 'Trade Defence'. Perhaps it is as well that less effective manufacturers were not given the task of producing the equipment for Fighter, let alone Bomber Command! His conclusions concerning successful procurement of new types of aircraft and systems appear to owe more to an ideal world than to the industrial and technological realities of the late 1930s.

John Buckley has much to say about relative priorities and is clearly intent on ramming home his view of the consequences of decisions to allocate resources to Bomber Command. He comes close to hyperbole on more than one occasion and arguably offers rather naive judgements about the circumstances of the inter-war years, about the consequences of the bomber offensive and about the options available to the Government in the first years of the war. He is slightly grudging in his acknowledgement of what was achieved by Coastal Command in the Battle of the Atlantic and may even have exaggerated the relative significance of the input of scientists of the Command's ORS, important though that was to what was more than anything a team effort.

Christina Goulter's book is as exhaustively researched as John Buckley's but may be seen to offer more by way of insights into the origins of maritime air power and certainly of the economic context in which Coastal Command operated. She is measured in her assessment of the relative merits and claim on resources of Coastal and Bomber Commands:

'... it is fallacious to argue, like one writer, that the Allied war effort would have been better served if large-scale resources had been transferred from Bomber to Coastal Command. .... A small reallocation of aircraft production resources to benefit Coastal Command should have been possible without affecting bomber operations, but anything greater might have jeopardised the offensive against mainland Germany.'

She makes the telling point that, like the Bomber Offensive, Coastal



Command's anti-shipping activities resulted in effects felt in other campaigns, let alone the material losses measured in shipping tonnage and interruption of the supply of strategic materials. The human and other resources tied up in defending against the Strike Wings led to German shortages elsewhere, including in the Atlantic campaign. In this respect, as in others, the anti-shipping effort was complementary to other campaigns.

Like Buckley, Goulter deals well with the effects of inter-Service co-operation (and non-co-operation) between the wars. She notes the lesson that should commend itself to military men of all generations, that the wheel need not constantly be reinvented: tactics explored in the 1920s had to be rediscovered by the Strike Wings, for lack of a collective memory. She is warm in her praise of what was achieved by the wings, in a squadron of which her own father served. She skilfully avoids any sense of a personal interest or point of view in what is a dispassionate and admirable analysis of events.

Both John Buckley and Christina Goulter are to be congratulated for lifting the lid on a number of the issues which plagued inter-Service co-operation between the wars and may still do so. Many of these contributed to an excessively defensive posture on the part of successive generations of airmen, traces of which may even yet be seen, possibly even with justification. Their work has made a useful contribution to an understanding of the factors surrounding such highly charged questions as ownership and command and control.

Of the two books, Buckley's appears almost to have been written to support a strongly held view of the culpability and neglect of the protagonists of a bombing strategy. It is, from time to time, slightly shrill, simplistic and repetitive. Its conclusions dwell on what might have happened, rather than what did:

'[defeat in the 1942-43 campaign] almost certainly would have caused the postponement of Overlord in 1944. That the Allies did not act until such a disaster seemed imminent, despite the appalling shipping losses, demonstrates the fact that the Air Staff and Churchill did not fully appreciate the importance of air power in trade defence. Moreover, such a near catastrophe illustrates emphatically how close such myopia came to losing the Battle of the Atlantic.'

Christina Goulter's work is less strident and covers a wider canvas, objectively and soberly. However, taken together, these new works add considerably to the understanding of the campaigns they describe.

Significantly, they offer new insights into inter-Service wrangling for a share of scarce resources in difficult defence and economic conditions. How familiar it all seems!

### **Sandy Hunter**

#### **RAF Nuclear Deterrent Forces** by Humphrey Wynn. HMSO £45

Some years ago, under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence, Humphrey Wynn had taken on the task of writing a documentary history of the Royal Air Force's role in providing Britain's nuclear deterrent and his work was published under 'Secret' classification in 1991. With the ending of the Cold War, the book has now been declassified and published on the open market by HMSO.

Essentially it is the story of the V-Bomber Force but it covers much wider ground to describe the development of our nuclear weapons, our nuclear strategy and tactics, the deployment of Thor missiles and the saga of Blue Streak, Skybolt and TSR2.

The book recognises the foresight and courage of the small group of Ministers who made the decision that Britain should develop her own nuclear weapons, the brilliance of the scientists who designed them and made them work and the imagination, drive and energy of those who developed the V-bombers and brought them into squadron service. All aspects of Bomber Command's operations are comprehensively covered bringing out the immense effort involved in building up what became the most formidable fighting force the RAF has ever possessed.

The V-Bomber Force never properly received the public recognition it deserved in providing over many years this country's strategic nuclear deterrent. Now Humphrey Wynn has told the story in considerable detail. The book stretches to 650 pages but is worth reading in its entirety. It provides a superb reference for historians but will also be of great interest to anyone who served in Bomber Command at the time or who was involved in the trials and development. I hope too that it will be appreciated and read by a much wider public for it is a fascinating and absorbing story.

### **Michael Beetham**

**Mirrors by the Sea** by Richard N Scarth. Hythe Civic Society, £3.50p p&p), (+ 50p p&p). Available from Dr N Scarth, 17 North Road, Hythe, Kent CT21 5DS.

Dr Scarth has produced an eminently readable and carefully researched account of the development of the Hythe Mirror System of acoustical sensors in the 1920s and '30s. This fascinating and well-illustrated account

takes the reader through the construction and trialing of the Hythe mirrors and describes in considerable detail the experiments in target detection and aircraft control carried out in conjunction with the Air Defence Experimental Establishment at Biggin Hill. It offers fascinating insights into problems of communication between sensor and operations rooms, and on early attempts to automate the upward flow of information, in order to make plotting less labour intensive.

This book is well presented. It is a good buy at the price and may be obtained from the author who continues his researches into the wider use of acoustic sensors. Dr Scarth's conclusions about the evolution of what was to become the air defence system of the Battle of Britain form a useful reminder of the process that began with Ashmore in WWI and later. He is to be congratulated on producing this very useful contribution to the history of air defence.

**Sandy Hunter**

**Wings over Burma**, by J Helsdon Thomas. First published 1984. New edition 1991. Merlin Books Ltd £4.95.

It is refreshing to read a book about squadron life in the Far East by one of our much beloved 'erks. It was very difficult for aircrew to imagine the very dreary life led by the groundcrew. The aircrew led the sort of life that books were written about but not so the groundcrew. Living conditions for the jungle air force were Spartan, although infinitely better than those endured by the Army. Most maintenance had to be carried out in the open on jungle air strips under relentless tropical sun or in monsoon conditions. From my own experience of a year spent on operations on 60 Squadron with Hurricane IIs I do not remember a single occasion when the squadron did not field twelve serviceable aircraft for operations. The standard of maintenance was first class considering the working conditions and I am delighted that this well-earned tribute to the groundcrew has been republished. For those both aircrew and groundcrew not privileged to serve in Burma it would be very difficult for them to imagine the conditions. For a start, the climate made one feel listless. Malaria and dysentery were rife, which meant that on several occasions ten per cent of the strength was in the sick-bay but the work was still accomplished to an astonishingly high standard. The groundcrew assigned to one's aircraft took a proprietorial interest in how it performed and readily criticised any poor take offs and landings. Even holes in the aircraft were deplored as a lack of care by the pilot. The bond between pilot and groundcrew was strong, not only because

of the pilot's desire for self-preservation. It was a privilege to be asked to review this book and I commend it as a true account to those anxious to know what it was like to be 'there' as fighter squadron groundcrew.

**Tony Jutsum**

**British Airfield Buildings of the Second World War** by Graham Buchan Aviation Pocket Guide No 1. Published by Midland Publishing Ltd. £5.95. Soft back. 128 pages. 227 photos.

A handy pocket sized reference guide (148×105 mm) to the remains, some quite substantial, of various specialised buildings to be found on RAF and some Naval Air Stations erected during the war years.

**The Forgotten Air Force – The RAF In The War Against Japan 1941-1945.** Air Commodore Henry Probert. Brassey's 1995. £35.

It was most appropriate that the last of the Society's Bracknell series of Anniversary Seminars should have covered the air war in the Far East, and thus left the campaign vividly etched in our minds. The 50th anniversary of VJ-Day gives the British people the opportunity to make some amends for their lack of recognition at the time, and to further redress the balance, Henry Probert has treated the subject with global appeal in his essentially readable study of the Royal Air Force in the war against Japan.

This is a major work drawing on a multitude of allied and Japanese documents with inputs from both official and private sources. Probert's masterly marshalling of the narrative treats the period to 1942 with its disastrous series of defeats in a fair and understanding way. The scapegoats (such as they exist) are the pre-war governments in London who failed to provide the resources needed, and the lack of vision by those on the spot. Wishful thinking about the capabilities of the Japanese did not help. In the event, heroism and self-sacrifice were not enough and the constant need in Whitehall to re-order priorities under the pressures of the European War and the policy of 'Germany First' resulted in any reinforcements to the Far East being 'too little and too late'. It must also be said that Japanese grasp of the use of air power particularly in counter-air, close support, and anti-shiping showed considerable maturity.

With the enemy held from India, the author blends together the changes in organisation, commanders, equipment, and attitudes in all three Services so necessary to go on to the offensive for the re-conquest of Burma. The closely interlocking army/air operations are amplified by good maps and chilling descriptions of the tenacity and brutality of the enemy.

Every theatre tended to produce a specialised aspect of air power and

the use of air transport as an effective offensive weapon in conjunction with ground forces was perfected in Burma. This enabled the Chindits to operate deep in enemy-held territory and for the army in their final advance to Malaya to leave the enemy in their rear and to be entirely dependent on air drop; until airfields could be captured. It was a failure of the Japanese to recognise that the destruction of the air transport force would be the best use of their dwindling air resources.

The distances involved put the operating range of aircraft at a premium and American designs tended to shine. By great ingenuity some bombing and clandestine operations far exceeded the manufacturers' parameters for both range and payload and, in spite of conflicting British and American policies for the area, the air forces worked together as one.

The narrative is supported by excellent appendices on strengths and organisations; an extensive bibliography; and a helpful chronology and glossary, as well as an accurate index and over 1,200 Notes.

The photographs are well chosen to give a good feel for the theatre but their reproduction is not always faultless.

This is a book that recognises the worth of the British, Dominion, and United States air forces and, in particular, their ground crews in achieving success. Even after VE-Day the expected flood of men and equipment transferred from Europe did not materialise. It was left to the surrender of Japan after the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to ease the privation and prevent further casualties to those who had done so much with so little but with scant public recognition of their achievements.

**Frederick Sowrey**

## **Errata**

The following corrections should be made to the text in *Journal 14*.

Page 12: Line 36: for 'simply' read 'simple'.

Page 14: bottom line: for 'sometime' read 'something'.

Page 34: Last two lines: 'the bombers depended, for example airfield construction; the design and building of the aircraft, engines, weapons ...'.

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