

Americans in the Royal Air Force

3rd July 2009

The Royal Air Force Museum, in the run up to American Independence Day, has launched a new online exhibition honouring those American men and women who joined the Royal Air Force during the both World Wars to defend Britain against hostile attack.

Men such as Olympian and playboy Billy Fiske “an American who died so that England might live” and women such as aviatrix and pioneer Jackie Cochran who was instrumental in recruiting American female pilots to serve in the Air Transport Auxiliary.

In this online exhibition the Museum recounts their stories, often, in their own words and the cultural challenges they faced; from not wishing to be considered “bragging Yanks” by their new comrades to potentially being branded traitors to their own countrymen for joining a foreign military service.

Stuart Hadaway, Curator of the exhibition states:

“ It is amazing how many Americans served with the British flying services during both of the World Wars. Hundreds served with the RAF in the Great War – far more than in the more famous French Escadrille Lafayette.

During the Second World War tens of thousands volunteered, and they made a valuable contribution. Their efforts were far from limited to the celebrated Eagle Squadrons; they served in every part of the RAF all around the world, and others, including women, flew as civilians with the Air Transport Auxiliary.

They came through a sense of adventure, or more often simply because they felt something must be done to stop the Germans.

Some, like Pilot Officer Billy Fiske, were rich and well-to-do people who literally gave up everything to come and fight for what they believed in. They may have broken American laws to do so, but long before Pearl Harbour these people were fighting for freedom, liberty, and every other American ideal. They were, and remain, the best of their country and true American heroes.”

Americans in the Royal Air Force can be viewed at www.rafmuseum.org/online-exhibitions.

Both of The Royal Air Force Museum's sites in London and in Cosford are open daily from 10am to 6pm. Admission is FREE. For further details visit the Museum's website www.rafmuseum.org.

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Notes To Editors:

- Royal Air Force Museum, Grahame Park Way, London, NW9 5LL
- Royal Air Force
- Open daily between 10am – 6pm (Last admission 5.30pm)
- Free admission and parking
- For further information and all media enquiries please contact Ajay Srivastava on 020 8358 6410 or ajay@rafmuseum.org