



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

1926 - 2022

From the Royal Air Forces Association Web Page

It was with deep sadness that the Royal Air Forces Association learned of the death of Her Majesty The Queen.

Having been a member of the Auxiliary Territorial Service, Her Majesty The Queen embodied the fortitude and resilience of our Second World War generation. Her sense of service to the nation and strength of character have been an inspiration to us all. We are immensely thankful for her lifetime of faithful service and we mourn her passing deeply.

The Association was immensely proud to have received Her Majesty's patronage since 1952, the same year we received our Royal Charter.

In recognition of the special role Her Majesty played within our organisation, the Association has created an online book of condolence, where employees and members can record their messages of sympathy for the Royal Family. This will be sent to His Royal Highness The King after Her Majesty's funeral. The book can be found at condolence.rafa.org.uk.

Our thoughts and sympathies are with the Royal Family at this difficult time.

Branch Membership

205

As at 1st September
2022

 **ROYAL
AIR FORCES**
Association

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH (now with Stevenage)

AUTUMN 2022



BATTLE of **BRITAIN** **SPECIAL**

“Heading Home” Photo by permission of “Photographed by Elliot”

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

Association Registered Charity: 226686 (England & Wales) SC037673 (Scotland)

Branch Registered Charity No. 1071536



RAFAGEN

The official newsletter and magazine of the
Letchworth & District Branch of the
Royal Air Forces' Association

Now including Stevenage

ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2022



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VISIT OUR
WEBSITE

rafa-leitchworth.org.uk



Message from the Branch Chairman, Warrant Office Shaun Griffin.

September has always been and will always be a special time for me. After 36 years in an RAF blue suit, some things just become part of your DNA.

For me Battle of Britain is just that, a church parade, a WOs' & Sgts' Mess Battle of Britain Cocktail Party,

Wings Appeal Collecting, coming together socially.

In the RAF it's one of the most enjoyable times of the year, I'm pleased to say that is reflected in our Association, and most certainly this year especially in our Branch.

The planned Battle of Britain Re-dedication Service and our Wings Appeal collecting plans really does define our groups priorities and highlight the things we hold dear. The Re-dedication Service this year will be a great occasion I'm sure, if the plans I've witnessed thus far are anything to go by. I guess a little like Christmas, it's so important not to forget the real reasons for the time to reflect - with the Battle of Britain of course it's the valor, courage, remembering and giving thanks for The Few.

Letchworth Hitchin and District Branch
Royal Air Forces Association

ROYAL AIRFORCES Association
Friendship | Help | Support

**BATTLE OF BRITAIN - A SERVICE OF
THANKSGIVING AND RE-DEDICATION**

**St Thomas, Wilbury
Bedford Road SG6 4DU
Sun 2 Oct 22 at 3pm**

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
Registered Charity 226686 (England & Wales).
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Find us on  www.rafa-leitchworth.org.uk





NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

What a July we had weather-wise. I even went through my wardrobe for a pair of shorts to wear. It brought back memories of nearly seventy years ago whilst serving in RAF Ceylon, The difference being that the shorts were shorter then, and the legs a lot more golden brown.



An event that also enjoyed fine weather was the Letchworth ARMED FORCES DAY. This was the first time we ventured out this year to start our Wings Appeal collection. What a great day. Well done to the Letchworth Royal British Legion and all their helpers. Plenty of people and plenty going on all the time. Well done to the Army Cadets on winning the parade and turnout challenge. We had a fly past again this year. A single Hurricane flew over Broadway Gardens a couple of times. We had a second fly past a short time later, but I think went un noticed by a lot of people. A Red Kite gave a nice display of gliding over the trees around the Gardens.

The RAFA Gazebo was, of course at the Letchworth Armed Forces Day event, and along with all the merchandise to sell in aid of our Wings Appeal, came our army of volunteers. In addition to our usual crew, Flight Lieutenant

MORE NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Liam Osbiston came all the way from RAF Brize Norton. Liam came attired in his RAF working clothes, a pilot's flying suit. This made one veteran comment, "If we left camp in uniform in my days, it had to be 'best blues' you would never be allowed out in working clothes". Things have changed mate, and it was great to see Liam dressed in his working clothes. This way everyone knew he was a pilot. Usually our unformed visitors are ground crew.

Also on parade in uniform was Shaun, our Branch Chairman, all the way up from Shropshire. Shaun not only helped promote the Association, he was also one of the judges to best cadet turnout.

In September of each year, we celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of Britain, and so we should. If those brave pilots had not done what they did, our lives, I am sure, would be a lot different today.

We had the Battle of Britain in 1940, but two years later and 3,000 miles away in the Indian Ocean, there was a similar battle being fought to save the island of Ceylon in 1942. This time the battle was between the Japanese and the RAF.

When I was stationed in Ceylon in the 1950's, I became interested in the history of the RAF on the island, so I began to research. I have reproduced part of what I found later in the issue. I learnt that not only were there heroics but amusing antidotes as you will see.

You should have read in the latest issue of AIRMAIL that our subscriptions have been reviewed for 2023/2024. Just in case you missed it, I repeat it below.

Association membership subscriptions are reviewed every two years and fees for 2023 onwards have been set by the Council, in accordance with resolution 7 passed in 2006. The Retail Price Index for the period from

MORE NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

December 2019 to December 2021 was used as the basis for calculations and an increase of 8% approved.

The new subscription rates, which will come into effect for joining or renewing members from 1st January 2023.

<i>Ordinary Membership</i>	£26.50
<i>Ordinary 4 year Membership</i>	£100.00
<i>Associate membership</i>	£18.50
<i>Associate 4 year Membership</i>	£72.00
<i>Associate Membership without AIRMAIL</i>	£14.00
<i>Associate 4 year Membership without AIRMAIL</i>	£56.50

*Monthly fees collected through RAF Pay from serving personnel under the Give As You Earn scheme will be **£2.72** from January 2023. This includes a defined addition for Tax Relief*

I am sure that I am not alone in saying that the latest issue of AIRMAIL was, in my opinion one of the best I have read since becoming a member. The contents covered all of the RAF family from the new recruit to the oldest veteran. With amusing articles in between. Like the article titled Matchstick Mayhem. Well done team.

Loneliness affects tens of thousands of people across the RAF community. Whether you are a veteran struggling to adapt to life after service, or just struggling, or a family member facing difficulties alone. Loneliness can be devastating to your mental health. RAFA is here to help. If you need help, a call to RAFA Head Quarters on 0800 01802361 can be a starting point to receiving help. But if you want something

MORE NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

local and meet like minded people, come along to the Branch NAAFI BREAK on the last Wednesday of each month at the Par 3 Golf Centre Willian Way Letchworth. 10.00hrs til noon. Meet people to chat with over a cup of coffee or tea. Need to know more? Phone Ken Needham on 01462 671534 he will give you all the 'gen' you need to know. We don't want to see anyone in RAF family lonely.

After hearing about the success of the Letchworth NAAFI Break, the Royal British Legion in Brampton decided to see if a similar event could be successful with them. With the help of one of our regulars, the Chairman of the Brampton RBL and the landlord of the local Ale House, and with all three services to call upon, they made their experiment.

They have had a few meetings now, with numbers growing at each meet. Well done Brampton.



We have been asked on numerous occasions why we only publish RAFAGEN on line nowadays. The answer is, sorry to say cost, no other reason. Before we stopped producing a hard copy, the cost of postage was twice that of the printing. Since then no doubt the print costs would have risen like everything else, and we know that the postage has increased. Plus the cost of the envelopes.

As you see from the cover, we have over 200 members, four times a year. I estimate that the cost would be well over £1,000. Such a cost this branch cannot justify.

We would like to see a hard copy distributed, as we are aware that many of our veterans do not like using computers, and we would like to reach all members.

Spitfires: 8 little-known facts

1 – Many pilots of the early Spitfires were unfamiliar with the plane's innovative retractable undercarriage. As a result, many early accidents were due to the pilots forgetting to lower their wheels when landing

2 – The Spitfire was the only plane to be continuously under construction throughout the Second World War.

3 – The small amount of Hurricanes left in flying condition meant that most of the aerial combat scenes in the 1969 film *The Battle of Britain* were filmed using Spitfires.

4 – Much to the delight of the grounded pilots, some of the Spitfires had modified under-wing mountings which, instead of carrying bombs, would house two small beer barrels.

5 – On *Battle of Britain Day*, pilot Sergeant Raymond Holmes spotted a German bomber heading for central London. With his Spitfire out of ammo, Holmes heroically decided to ram the bomber, disabling it over Victoria station.

6 – The Spitfires used in *The Battle of Britain* film were so well camouflaged against land and sky that they were almost invisible on camera. The aerial scenes therefore had to be shot with clouds in the background so the planes could be seen.

7 – After the victory of the *Battle of Britain*, the first patrols over France since its fall in December 1940 were deployed. The patrols were carried out by pairs of Spitfires and were known as 'Rhubarbs'.

8 – The Spitfire's maiden flight was on 5th March 1936. It entered service with the RAF in 1938 and remained there until 1955. During this time, 20,351 Spitfires were built.

The Battle of Britain: A Brief Guide

What?

The Battle of Britain is the name given to the World War II air campaign waged by the German Air Force against the United Kingdom during the summer and autumn of 1940. The name derives from a famous speech delivered by *Prime Minister Winston Churchill* in the House of Commons: “The Battle of France is over. I expect the Battle of Britain is about to begin...”

When?

Common opinion is that the Battle of Britain took place between 10th July and 31st October 1940. There are believed to have been four main phases to the battle: 10th – 11th August, 12th – 23rd August, 24th – 6th August and 7th September onwards.

Who?

The German Luftwaffe’s Messerschmitt Bf109E and Bf 110C fought against the British RAF’s Hurricane MKI and the Spitfire MKI.

Where?

From July 1940 coastal shipping convoys and shipping centres were the main targets of the attacks; one month later the Luftwaffe shifted its attacks to RAF airfields and infrastructure. As the battle progressed the Luftwaffe also targeted aircraft factories and ground infrastructure and eventually resorted to attacking British towns and cities.

Why?

The Germans planned to invade Britain with the objective of landing 160,000 soldiers along a forty mile coastal stretch of South-East England. This plan was code named Operation Sea lion.

Hitler’s generals were very worried about the damage that the Royal Air Force could inflict on the German Army during the invasion and so Hitler therefore agreed that the invasion should be postponed until the British

Air Force had been destroyed. Accordingly the campaign objective was one of gaining air superiority over the RAF, especially Fighter Command.

Significance

The Battle of Britain was the first major campaign to be fought entirely by air forces, and was also the largest and most sustained aerial bombing campaign to that date. The Battle of Britain marked the first defeat of Hitler's military forces.

Outcome

Air superiority was originally seen as the key to British victory at the Battle of Britain. Records show that during the period of the Battle the Luftwaffe lost somewhere in the region of 1,652 aircraft, including 229 twin engine and 533 single engine fighters.

RAF Fighter Command aircraft losses totalled 1087 from July 10th to October 30th 1940, including 53 twin engine fighters. In addition the RAF lost 376 Bomber Command and 148 Coastal Command aircraft conducting bombing, mining, and reconnaissance operations in defence of the country.

The above is an article from Military History Matters.

The Battle of Britain and the Blitz

On 20th August 1940, at the height of the Battle of Britain, Churchill addressed the Commons to outline the war situation. In the middle of this speech, he made a statement that created a famous nickname for the Royal Air Force fighter pilots involved in the battle:

*“The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and by their devotion. **“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”**”.*



COMMITTEE NEWS

JULY 2022

During the holiday season it is very difficult to get a group of people together, and getting the Committee together this month was more than difficult, it was impossible.

A meeting was held, but as there was not a quorum, therefore no decisions were made.

Those present reflected on the Letchworth Armed Forces Day, and passed on their thanks to the members of the Letchworth Royal British Legion who organised it. Special mention to Penny of the Royal Naval Association for organising the fly past.

Everything is on track for the RAFA stall on Hitchin Old Market Place in September. (This event will be over by the time this issue is circulated).

October 2nd is the day we are holding a Church Service to remember those brave airmen who fought so well to safeguard these shores. Why October and not September? Everyone is busy collecting for Wings or on holiday. If you would like to join us at St Thomas's Church Letchworth, would you please let Marie know as it is only a small church and numbers are limited. Marie's email is secretary@rafa-lechworth.org.uk.

A Christmas Bash was mentioned, but as those present couldn't make any decisions, a few suggests were made ready for the next meeting in September.

Top 5 Facts About The Hawker Hurricane

1. HISTORY

This plane has already established its credentials as one of the aircraft which played a significant role in history. It all began in 1933. According to historylearningsite.co.uk, Hawker Hurricane chief designer Sydney Camm discussed the possibilities of producing a monoplane fighter with the Air Ministry. The prototype Hurricane flew on November 6th, 1935. Fast forward to September 1939. The Hawker Hurricane has already achieved so much. This fighter plane was the first RAF plane to destroy one of the German bomber planes in the following month.

2. SPECIFICATIONS

This single-seated combat aircraft stands tall at the height of 13 feet, with a wingspan of 40 feet, and is 32 feet long, according to thoughtco.com. The Hawker Hurricane uses a Rolls Royce V-12 engine that gives the aircraft its maximum speed of 340 mph. It also has a weapon load that can carry four cannons and two bombs. The Hawker Hurricane can then launch these weapons at a combat range of 600 miles.

3. HIGH SURVIVABILITY RATE

In total, there are over 14,000 units built during its production from 1937 to 1944. It has 25 variants that are scattered out in 25 nations worldwide. In today's time, this aircraft would cost around 350,000 US\$. Furthermore, the Hawker Hurricane is one of the most prolific fighter aircraft of WWII, which had a high survivability rate, according to baesystems.com. The main reason for the Hurricane's high survivability rate is its robust airframe structure and the canvas that covered it.

4. GAME-CHANGING DESIGN

The Hawker Hurricane was a massive game-changer compared to the biplanes it replaced. According to the Royal Air Force Museum, not only did it have a single set of wings, but it also had retractable landing gear and a fully enclosed cockpit. These features made the Hawker Hurricane faster, more agile, and safer for pilots than its predecessors.

5. BRITAIN'S BEST FIGHTER IN WORLD WAR 2

Throughout the years, the Hawker Hurricane was in constant comparison against the Supermarine Spitfire for the unofficial title of being Britain's best combat aircraft in World War 2. According to internationalaviationhq.com, both prior and during WWII, the Hurricane and Spitfire were immensely successful aircraft.

The advantage the Spitfire has is having a faster speed and more armament capacity than the Hurricane. But even if the Spitfire has a giant weapon load, it still uses weaker guns than the ones used by Hurricane. The Hurricane also has a broader combat range of 600 miles compared to Spitfire's 248 miles

IT'S BEEN DONE BEFORE



Jet Provosts of RAF Support Command fly past in a symbolic "25" formation for the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Reproduced from the Autumn 1977 issue of AIR MAIL.

LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY ARMED FORCES DAY

2022 GALLERY



Two Ex Snowdrops



Shaun & Lindsay



Shaun & Liam



Fly past Number One by the Letchworth ATC



Liam explains to a couple of Cadets what the RAF is really like





Photo by permission of “Photographed by Elliot”

Fly past

POST OFFICE ALERT

The old type postage stamp is being phased out, but you can carry on using any non-barcoded stamps you have until 31 January 2023.



For most people that will mean they have time to use up any of the old stamps they have before that date.

If you have too many stamps to use them up before this date you can exchange them for new barcoded ones through Royal Mail’s ‘Swap Out’ scheme.

Special stamps with pictures on and Christmas stamps without a bar code will continue to be valid and don’t need to be swapped.

A Little Known Aspect of the Battle of Britain

By Jim Box



Lord Dowding

We all know the history of the Battle of Britain in 1940 involving the Spitfires Hurricanes, the pilots, and the part radar played detecting and directing interception of incoming raids, together with the Royal Observer Corps who tracked aircraft across the Country. However, the Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command, Sir Hugh Dowding, also had other means to help with intelligence and information to counter the air attacks. These were radio Direction Finding (D/F), to pinpoint Luftwaffe bases on the other side of the Channel, interrogation of POW aircrew, captured maps and documents from crashed enemy aircraft, plus photo reconnaissance.

There was also another source of intelligence available to Dowding that helped him plan the defence of the UK and that was “Ultra”. We are all familiar with the classifications of information such as “Secret”, “Top Secret” and “Most Secret”, but there was a fourth, “Ultra”. Intelligence and information contained in “Ultra” documents was obtained from the code braking of Luftwaffe ciphers by the Government Code and Cipher School at Bletchley Park. The Luftwaffe ciphers had been broken by June 1940 and decrypts were classified “Ultra” and only very few personnel were allowed access. Dowding

was one of those, together with Churchill and the other heads of the Army and Navy. “Ultra” information was never referred to by name, just “intelligence sources reveal, or suggest”. “Ultra” documents were sent from Bletchley Park directly to the few recipients by armed dispatch riders with orders to shoot anybody who tried to stop him.

Luftwaffe Headquarters Operations sent signals detailing the next day targets to the units to be involved. The “Ultra” intelligence decrypts of those signals indicated the general target areas and the Luftwaffe air fleets assigned.

Throughout the Battle of Britain, the code breaking at Bletchley Park was able to provide Dowding with the target area by the early hours of the morning of the day of the attack. The various phases of the attacks, such as Channel shipping, Channel ports, Chain Home radar stations, various fighter bases, and finally London, were all known in advance. Sometimes it was known which individual fighter stations were to be attacked. All this advanced intelligence allowed Dowding and Fighter Command to make best use of the squadrons at their disposal, keeping others in reserve and bringing in Squadrons from other parts of the country.

It is generally accepted that 15th September was the day that the Luftwaffe was defeated and is remembered as “Battle of Britain Day”. German intelligence reports had suggested that the RAF was virtually destroyed, but German pilots were reporting being

attacked by ghost squadrons, which they had been told no longer exist.

A Bletchley Park decrypt of a message on 17th September was an order to dismantle air loading equipment on Dutch bases. This was the first indication that that Operation Sealion, the invasion of Britain, was postponed.

Although “Ultra” gave advanced warning of areas to be attacked it was still the pilots of Fighter Command that had to defend the country against the air raids in the summer of 1940.



Bletchley Park

THE EARLY DAYS OF ROYAL AIR FORCE COLOMBO

Compiled by Ken Needham

“The most dangerous moment of the war, and one which caused me the greatest alarm, was when the Japanese fleet was heading for Ceylon and the naval base there. The capture of Ceylon, the consequent control of the Indian Ocean and the possibility at the same time of a German conquest of Egypt would have closed the ring and the future would have been black.”

- *Sir Winston Churchill*

In 1934 the Sinhalese Government, or as it was then known, The State Council of Ceylon, decided to build an airport within easy reach of the capital city of Colombo. They decided upon Ratmalana for the site, which is on the south-east side of the city. The 27th November 1935 saw the first aircraft to land at the new airport. This was a De Haviland Puss Moth flown by Tyndale Bisco, Chief Flying instructor of the Madras Flying Club.

oooOOOooo

By 1942, World War II had spread to the Far East with the entry of Japan and the USA into the war, with the attack on Pearl Harbour. After this conquest, the Japanese were poised to enter the India Ocean, and in their minds, enter it unopposed.

The British Chiefs of Staff began to assemble forces that would defend Ceylon, for in Mr Churchill’s words, “Ceylon must not fall”.

A decision to send the fighters of 30 and 261 Squadrons to Ceylon was made in early February 1942. Both Squadrons, then in the Middle East, were declared non-operational. The 24 Hawker Hurricanes of 30 Squadron were crated, and sailed on Aircraft Carrier, HMS Indomitable bound for

Ceylon on 26th February. On 5th March as the carrier neared Ceylon, all available hands began assembling the crated Hurricanes on the ship's hanger deck, and on the following morning 20 of the 24 Hurricanes took off bound for Ratmalana. Only 19 were to make that first flight, as one had to turn back with engine trouble.

With 30 Squadron came 413 Squadron. This Squadron, a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, operating Catalina flying boats. As water was the main requirement for this squadron they were sent to R.A.F. Koggala, a station at the side of a lake to the south of Colombo.

R.A.F. Koggala had been built a few months earlier to accommodate conventional aircraft. According to the locals from the surrounding area, mass evacuation of those living around Koggala had taken place within twenty-four hours in order to establish the airfield for use by the Royal Air Force. The reason for the urgency is not recorded. 18 Temples had to be demolished during the construction and even today ruins of some of these can be seen. Construction work of the runway began in mid 1941 and about 1500 labourers from nearby villages were employed on daily payment of 79 cents per person per day. (In today's exchange rate this is too low to calculate).

On 6th March 1942, a Royal Air Force station was officially opened on the Old Colombo Racecourse site only a short distance from the already established Ratmalana airfield. Squadron Leader Eggiesfield of 222 Group was to be the first Commanding Officer.

Accommodation was none existent, so external premises had to be acquired. A bungalow called "Lakshimgri" was requisitioned for the Sergeants Mess, and a further two bungalows named "Hughendon" and "Hurley Lodge" were requisitioned for the Officers Mess. (*I could not find any records of where the "other ranks" were billeted*). The station would be serviced for all medical needs by a newly established military hospital in the premises of Royal College Colombo. Stores and personnel arrived at the new station from 11th March, and began immediately on making the station operational.

R.A.F. Colombo was officially named on 14th March, after the name R.A.F. Torrington had been rejected. Torrington being the name of the district of Colombo.

A second squadron arrived at the station on 18th March; this was No. 11 Squadron which had also been sent from the Middle East. The Head Quarters of this outfit was to be at 16 Gregory's Road. The Officers were billeted at "St David's" and "Sheen" Torrington Place. Senior N.C.O.'s were billeted in the Dining Hall of St Bridget's Convent and the "other ranks" at the Cricket Club. All their equipment was stored in "Torrington Towers".

After hard work all round, the station was declared operational on the 19th March.

The 23rd March 1942 saw yet another Squadron arrive at the air field. This was 258 Squadron with more Hurricanes. Accommodation was still scarce, so the members of this team were billeted in the Pavilion of the Ladies Golf Club. The Service Section of the Squadron was established at 41 Guildford Crescent.

Training had continued from the day the station became operation until 28th March.

Reports had been received that the Japanese Fleet had left the East Indies and was bound for Ceylon. Just before dusk on 4th April, Catalina QL-A, flown by 413 Squadron's Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader Birchall, sighted a large Japanese fleet 400 miles south of Ceylon. The radio operator was able to transmit the fleet's location before he was shot down by six "Zero" fighters from the carrier "Hiryu". This was to become one of World War II's memorable events. Three of the nine man crew were killed when the aircraft was brought down, while all of the others, some with grievous injuries, spent the duration of the war as Japanese prisoners of war. It was first thought that all the crew had perished, until after the war when it was learnt that six members had

survived. For this deed Squadron Leader Birchall became known as the **"Saviour of Ceylon"**

At R.A.F. Colombo, most personnel were up by 04.00 hrs. And the aircraft made for immediate readiness. The Royal Air Force were at that time unaware of the range of the "Zero", but Colombo Operations thought that the attack was most likely to come the following day, but nevertheless the crews watched and waited.

The Japanese now knew that their element of surprise had passed so they began plans for an immediate attack. Unbeknown to the enemy the island had modest radar coverage, and the radar posts were linked by commandeered telephone lines to Fighter Operations Headquarters in Colombo. Unbelievably, the radar posts were not manned when the Japanese Air Force crossed the coastline south of Colombo, this was due to the fact that the system shut down on Sundays for maintenance, so when the Japanese were 200 miles from their target they launched 125 aircraft under the command of Commander Mitsuo Fuchida who had led the attack on Pearl Harbour, there would be no warning by radar.

Fuchida's force consisted of 36 'Val' dive bombers, 53 'Kate' attack bombers and an escort of 36 'Zeros' Leaving a further 180 aircraft in reserve. Unbeknown to the Japanese, the Eastern Fleet (their target) was at Addu Atoll, in the Maldives, some 500 miles away to the west of Ceylon. Only HMS Dorestshire and HMS Cornwall were in Colombo harbour, or rather were, because they had put to sea as soon as the report had been received from the 413 squadron's Catalina.

At around 08.00 hrs. on Sunday 5th March 1942, the crews at R.A.F. Colombo saw the formations of Japanese aircraft overhead. The signal for the squadron to scramble was to come from the control tower personnel, who were to fire a "Very" pistol. This morning it was the duty Officer who was to fire the pistol, but he was so excited that he forgot that he was inside the tower when he fired. Apparently it was pretty exciting for the Control Tower personnel dodging the flare. With no alarm sounded common sense took over and the rush to take off began.

As the Hurricanes of 30 Squadron began to take off, enemy dive-bombers put the airfield under attack. Once in the air, the Hurricanes found themselves in a disadvantage, for at low level.

The Japanese Zero was a lot more manoeuvrable than the Hurricane. The only advantage that the allies had was that the Hurricane was a more robust aircraft, than the Zeroes which was quite flimsy, and could not take much damage.



The airfield was not the prime target of the Japanese aircraft, that was the harbour, and they were disappointed to see that the ‘fleet’ was not there. Unfortunately for the Dorsetshire and the Cornwall they were soon spotted by one of the enemies ‘float’ planes heading south-south west

After the raid the pilots of 30 Squadron claimed fourteen enemy aircraft destroyed, six more probably destroyed and five more damaged. These figures have been disputed, but the squadron stand by these reports. Statistics that cannot be disputed is the claim that three Japanese aircraft were shot down over Colombo. One of these “kills” was claimed by Flt Lt James H. Whalen, who was to become one of the heroes of 30 Squadron. Eight of 30 Squadron had failed to return.

During the raid the Japanese bombed the R.A.F. Units at Ratmalana yet passed over the Racecourse airstrip without knowing that it existed. It is believed that the only casualty at the racecourse amongst the ground crew was an airman standing under a coconut palm, being hit by a coconut shaken loose by a bomb blast.

This raid coming only a month after Royal Air Force Colombo opened will remain as one of the events of the Second World War, for had the Japanese been able to land on the island; they would have controlled the whole of the Indian Ocean, which could have had devastating results for the Allies.

On 28th June 1942, Lt Gen. HRH The Duke of Gloucester arrived on the station, as part of his tour of British Defences of Ceylon, India and North Africa. During the flight to Ceylon his Lockheed aircraft, developed engine trouble. Because of the lack of tools to repair this American engine, his stay on the island was a little longer than expected.

Fly pasts over Colombo were a regular occurrence to help bolster moral amongst the Sinhalese people. One of those Fly pasts recorded, was on 30th August 1942 when the full strength of Royal Air Force Colombo took to the air. This consisted of :-

- Seven Beauforts of 22 Squadron
- Twelve Hawker Hurricanes (2b) of 258 Squadron
- Nine Blenheims of 11 Squadron
- Twelve Hawker Hurricanes (2b) of 273 Squadron
- Twelve Hawker Hurricanes (2c) of 30 Squadron



The home of the Branch NAAFI BREAK

Last Wednesday morning of each month 10.00 hrs til noon

ALL MEMBERS OF THE RAF FAMILY WELCOME

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association

James Dempster of Carterton, Oxfordshire

Charlotte Bennett of Colne, Wiltshire



Photographed By Elliot

Contemporary Photographic Art

Thanks to
Elliot for
taking some of
the photos in
this special
issue of
RAFAGEN
especially for
us



Find me on



or email me on...

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The RAFAGEN is produced every quarter and sent to members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District branch of the Royal Air Forces Association.

If you would like to tell your story in RAFAGEN or have any comments about the magazine, the branch or the Association, we would like to hear from you. It can either be by hard copy through the mail, (any photographs will be returned immediately) to Ken Needham 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3HJ, or via email to kwn056@btinternet.com

The next issue will be published in Late November 2022

NAAFI BREAKS and events for the next few months are as follows :-

Sunday 3rd October 2022 Battle of Britain Service

Wednesday 29th October 2022 NAAFI Break

Wednesday 27th November 2022 NAAFI Break

December NAAFI BREAK Christmas “Get-together” TBA

Should you wish not to receive the regular issues of RAFAGEN, would you please advise the branch secretary on secretary@rafa-letchworth.org.uk, who will arrange for your address to be deleted from our list.

