

The

# *Spirit* of

# **North Weald**

The North Weald Airfield History Series | Booklet 9



Tying up some loose ends  
about people

# No 11 Group

## This historic RAF Group is still active

During the 1930s, the RAF changed the structure of home defence, then called Air Defence of Great Britain, to take account of changes in technology that were being introduced, such as metal monoplane aircraft and Radio Direction Finding (radar). In place of the old Fighting Areas and Bombing Areas, a range of functional rather than geographic commands were set up: Fighter Command, Bomber Command, Coastal Command, Training Command, Transport Command, Balloon Command or Maintenance Command for example.

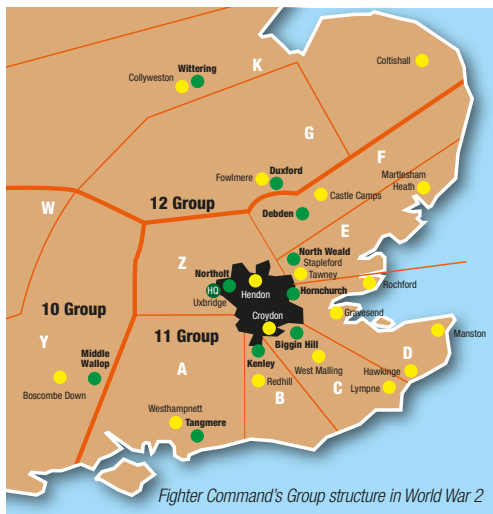
The Commands were further divided into geographical Groups. In Fighter Command, the Groups were No 10 covering the south west and Wales, No 11 in the strategically important south east and London, No 12 guarding the industrial Midlands and 13 Group in the north of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

These were set up in May 1936, with 11 Group replacing the Fighting Area, of which North Weald had been in Sector B. Each Fighter Command Group was similarly divided into smaller Sectors with their own Headquarters and Control Rooms. There were seven Sectors in 11 Group – A to E plus Z, which also had the Group Headquarters and Operations Room at RAF Uxbridge.

North Weald was now the main Sector Station and HQ of Sector E. Its satellite was Stapleford Tawney, and it shared Martlesham Heath near Ipswich with Debden (Sector F to the north) and Rochford (Southend) with Hornchurch (Sector D to the south) as forward bases. Sector E was responsible for covering London, the north bank of the Thames estuary, Essex and convoys sailing up the east coast. During the Dunkirk evacuation and Battle of Britain in 1940, fighters from the Sector fought all over the South East and English Channel, as well as guarding their own area.

No 11 Group was in the forefront of the Battle of Britain,

*Spitfire IXc MA755 / FN-W served with 331 (Norwegian) Squadron at North Weald and carried red, white and blue cannon bands and an unofficial Squadron crest. It later went to 611 Squadron and was shot down attacking motor transport over France on 14 August 1944. The French pilot, Lieutenant Robert Gouby, was killed.*



with its controllers directing the squadrons into combat several times a day. North Weald suffered around a quarter of its wartime fatalities during this period.

Later in the war the Group went onto the offensive, flying bomber escorts and fighter sweeps over occupied Europe. Following World War 2, No 11 Group's organisation was simplified because many airfields were now surplus to requirements. North Weald was designated as the South East Sector HQ. The Group was then reorganised into just two Sectors – Southern and Metropolitan, covering the whole of the south of England.

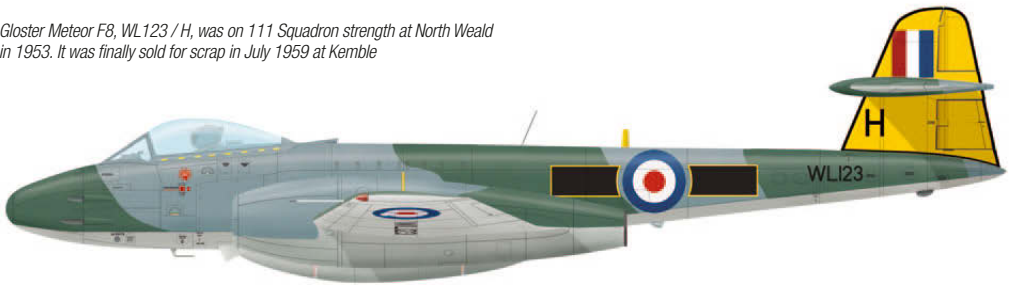
The Metropolitan Sector HQ was located at North Weald from 1 May 1946 to 14 July 1947, which also housed the Sector's Communications Flight until 1957.

The Airfield had been used by Transport Command in May 1945, with operational flying ceasing in 1947. Fighter Command returned to North Weald again in 1949 when two Royal Auxiliary Air Force Spitfire squadrons arrived from Hendon as the Cold War got underway. They were later joined by the Vampires of 72 Squadron.

The Metropolitan Sector HQ was subsequently relocated



*Gloster Meteor F8, WL123 / H, was on 111 Squadron strength at North Weald in 1953. It was finally sold for scrap in July 1959 at Kemble*



to the ROTOR SOC-R4 bunker at Kelvedon Hatch in 1953, although that was soon rendered obsolete by developments in radar technology.

In December 1951, 11 Group's Southern Sector had 1 and 29 / 22 Squadrons at Tangmere along with 54 / 247 Squadrons at Odiham. The ROTOR Southern Sector HQ was located at Box in Wiltshire.

The Metropolitan Sector had 25 Squadron plus 85 / 145 Squadrons with Meteor NF11s based at West Malling, 41 / 253 Squadrons were at Biggin Hill, 63 and 56 / 87 Squadrons at Waterbeach, with 64 / 65 Squadrons at Duxford. North Weald hosted 72 Squadron along with 601 and 604 Squadrons of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, while 257 / 263 Squadrons were at Wattisham. (The paired squadrons shared the same aircraft at this time.)

The direction of the air threat had now shifted to the north and east, and with the comparatively short range of the early generations of jet fighters, the locations of many southern stations were no longer viable for carrying out

interceptions. Many were closed and this was followed by the disbandment of a number of squadrons in the 1957 Duncan Sandys defence cuts.

In 1958 the 11 Group HQ was moved to Martlesham Heath. Following a further reorganisation the Group was disbanded on 31 December 1960. One day later 13 Group was renumbered as 11 Group, and this later became No 11 (Northern) Sector in 1963.

Fighter Command was merged with Bomber Command to create Strike Command in April 1968. No 11 Group continued to have responsibility for the UK Air Defence Region, with its HQ now based at Bentley Priory. The Group was then renamed No 11 (Air Defence) Group in January 1986. The Group lasted until 1996, when it was amalgamated with No 18 Group to form No 11/18 Group.

In July 2018, it was announced that No 11 Group was to be reformed as a 'multi-domain operations group' to integrate the air, space and cyber domains under a single command. It is now based at High Wycombe. ■

*Spitfire Mark IX from 331 (Norwegian) Squadron undergoing servicing in Hangar 3. This bears the same unofficial Squadron crest as the Spitfire MA755 profile opposite, and may be the same airframe*



Forseters museum / Norway

# North Weald's Commanders

## Some of our best-known leaders

### Sir Arthur Harris

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur Harris was born on 13 April 1892. He emigrated to Southern Rhodesia in 1910, aged 17. At the outbreak of war in 1914 he joined the Rhodesia Regiment as a bugler and subsequently returned to England in 1915 to fight with the Royal Flying Corps after learning to fly at Brooklands.

He commanded B Flight of 39 (Home Defence) Squadron for several months, and engaged in combat with Zeppelin LZ97 on 24/25 April 1916 flying from Hounslow. Using the newly-issued incendiary ammunition, he suffered repeatedly from jammed guns.

After service in France with 45 Squadron, he returned to the UK to command 44 Squadron of Sopwith Camel nightfighters which came to North Weald from Hainault Farm in 1919 and disbanded here at the end of that year. He had claimed five aircraft destroyed.

He remained in the Air Force through the 1920s and 1930s, serving in India, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Persia, Egypt, Palestine, and elsewhere with bomber and flying boat squadrons. In September 1939 he took command of 5 Group, Bomber Command. In February 1942 was appointed AOC-in-C of Bomber Command. He kept that position until the end of the war and single-mindedly implemented the Air Staff's area bombing policy, which later generated much controversy.

Harris retired from the RAF on 15 September 1946 and in 1948 moved to South Africa. He returned to England in 1953, and died on 5 April 1984 aged 91.

### Victor Beamish

Group Captain Francis Victor Beamish DSO\*, DFC, AFC was born on 27 September 1903. In August 1923 he was granted a permanent commission as Pilot Officer with 4 (Army Co-operation) Squadron at Farnborough. He then joined 31 Squadron at Ambala, in India on 18 November 1925.

After serving on the staff of RAF Cranwell and then taking part in an exchange with the Royal Canadian Air Force, he joined 25 Squadron at Hawkinge as a Flight Commander. In 1933 he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and had to resign his commission.

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In 1934 he managed to secure a civilian position with 2 Flying Training School at RAF Digby, and later regained his commission as a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF Reserve. He was then able to regain full flying status and his permanent commission and was posted to command 2 Armament Training Camp and then the Meteorological Flight at Aldergrove, for which he received an Air Force Cross.

In 1937 he commanded 64 Squadron at Church Fenton. After a staff college course, he then went to 504 Squadron at Digby in September 1939 and from there on a staff assignment to Canada in January 1940. In March 1940 he was promoted to Wing Commander and returned to take command of North Weald through the difficult period of the Battle of Britain.

As a fighter pilot he took part in many squadron operations during the Battle of France and Battle of Britain, scoring victories including Junkers Ju 87 Stukas, Dornier Do 17s and Messerschmitt Bf 109s destroyed or damaged. He was awarded both the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and Distinguished Flying Cross at this time. He received a Bar to his DSO in 1941.

He was appointed to command RAF Kenley in January 1942 and continued to take part in operations. He was killed in action on 28 March 1942 flying with 485 (New Zealand) Squadron near Calais when in combat with Bf 109s.



Station Commander Thomas Pike briefing 222 Squadron pilots and Wing Leader David Scott Malden



## Sir Thomas Pike

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Thomas Pike, GCB, CBE, DFC\*, DL was born on 29 June 1906. He was commissioned as a Pilot Officer on 16 December 1925 and joined 6 Squadron at Biggin Hill, where he flew Gloster Grebes and Armstrong Whitworth Siskin fighters.

He then completed the instructors' course at the Central Flying School in 1928 and became an instructor with 5 Flying Training School at RAF Sealand and then at the Central Flying School, where he was a member of the aerobatic team.

Promoted to Flight Lieutenant in July 1930 he attended the Long Aircraft Engineering Course at the Home Aircraft Depot at Henlow and was posted to the Engineering Staff at the RAF Depot in the Middle East in October 1932.

He was subsequently an instructor at 4 Flying Training School at RAF Abu Suwayr in late 1934. After attending the RAF Staff College from January 1937, he was promoted to Squadron Leader. He was posted to 10 Flying Training School at Ternhill as Chief Flying Instructor in January 1938.

He then became a staff officer in the Deputy Directorate of Peace Organisation within the Air Ministry in February 1939. At the outbreak of war he served initially on the Air Staff within the Directorate of Organisation the Air Ministry.

In February 1941, he became Commanding Officer of 219 Squadron flying Bristol Beaufighters from Tangmere and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) on 13 May 1941 and a bar to the DFC on 30 May 1941 for operations flown against *Luftwaffe* night raiders. He was

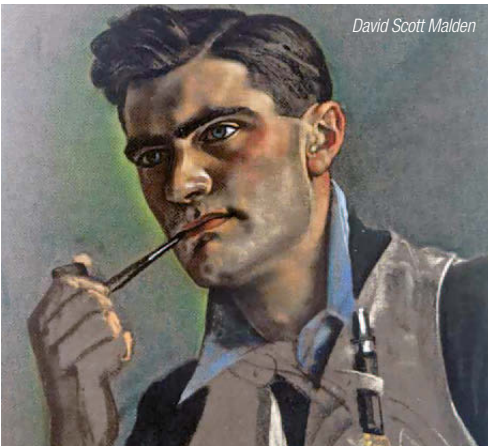
then given command of 11 Group's night fighter force in September 1941. From this staff post he went on to be Station Commander at North Weald in February 1942.

Promoted to Group Captain in March 1942, he commanded 1 Mobile Operations Room Unit during the landings in Italy during May. From there he went on to be Senior Air Staff Officer at HQ Desert Air Force in February 1944.

After the war he stayed in the RAF and was Director of Operational Requirements at the Air Ministry from October 1946, being promoted to Air Commodore in July 1947. Then, after attending the Imperial Defence College in 1949, he was made Air Officer Commanding 11 Group in January 1950, which included RAF North Weald in the Metropolitan Sector.

He became Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations) at HQ Allied Air Forces Central Europe in July 1951, Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Policy) in June 1953 and Deputy Chief of the Air Staff with the rank of Air Marshal on 9 November 1953. He went on to be AOC-in-C at RAF Fighter Command in August 1956, and was promoted to Air Chief Marshal on 1 November 1957.

Pike became Chief of the Air Staff on 1 January 1960, and was promoted to Marshal of the Royal Air Force on 6 April 1962. He was then Deputy Supreme Commander Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe from January 1964 until his retirement in March 1967. He then lived in Hastingwood and was made a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Essex in February 1973. He died in 1983 and is buried in St Andrew's Churchyard.



David Scott Malden



Wilfred Duncan Smith in the south of France in 1944 with 324 Wing

## David Scott Malden

Air Vice-Marshal Francis David Scott-Malden was born on 26 December 1919 at Portslade in Sussex. He joined the University Air Squadron in November 1938 and transferred to the RAFVR in June 1939 as an Airman u/t Pilot. He was called up and commissioned in October 1939.

On 10 June 1940 he arrived at 5 OTU Aston Down and after converting to Spitfires joined 611 Squadron at Digby. In early October 1940 he went to 603 Squadron at Hornchurch. Successes in combat led to a Flight command in May 1941, and the award of a Distinguished Flying Cross in August. He was also given command of 54 Squadron.

In late November 1941 he was posted to HQ 14 Group, Inverness, on staff duties as an operational rest. He next took command the North Weald Norwegian Wing in March 1942, where he led its squadrons in sweeps over Europe, for which he was awarded the DSO and the Norwegian War Cross. The latter was presented by King Haakon of Norway.

He was then posted away for a rest and sent on a tour of American universities. From July to October 1943 he was Liaison Officer with 8th Bomber Command USAF. He was Station Commander at Hornchurch from October 1943 to February 1944, when he was posted to a mobile GCU in 2 TAF, preparing for the invasion of Europe.

After D-Day the unit moved to Normandy. In August 1944 Scott-Malden was promoted to Group Captain and took command of 126 Wing. In April 1945 he went to the Air Ministry planning redeployments from Europe to the Far East.

After the war he reverted to Squadron Leader, and followed the usual mix of staff and command duties, including planning for the Suez campaign in 1956. He retired from the RAF in 1966 as an Air Vice-Marshal, and died on 1 March 2000.

## Wilfred Duncan Smith

Group Captain Wilfrid Duncan Smith, DSO\*, DFC\*\*, AE was born on 28 May 1914 in Madras. In 1936 returned to the UK and joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR). He was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in September 1940.

He posted to No. 611 Squadron at Hornchurch flying Spitfires in October 1940. As a result of his success in combat, he was awarded his first Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in June 1941, and went to 603 Squadron in August as a Flight Commander.

In November he was taken ill with double pneumonia while flying as a result of operational exhaustion. He had recovered by January 1942 and rejoined the Hornchurch Wing, subsequently being given command of 54 Squadron.

During the ill-fated Dieppe Raid (*Operation Jubilee*) on 19 August, he was shot down into the English Channel and rescued. Later in the month he was posted to take over the North Weald Wing. In November he was rested from operations, taking charge of the Tactics Branch at Fighter Command.

From there he was sent to Malta to command the 244 Fighter Wing, and flew in support of the Allied landings on Sicily in September 1943. He later fought in Italy and the south of France with 324 Wing as an acting Group Captain, before returning to the UK in March 1945.

In March 1948, he was granted a permanent commission with the rank of Squadron Leader. He received a second Bar to his DFC for service in the Malayan Emergency in 1952, and was promoted to Wing Commander in January 1953. He retired on 24 November 1960, with the rank of Group Captain. He died in December 1996.



*Douglas Bader preparing to lead the first Battle of Britain flypast from North Weald in 1945.*

## Sir Douglas Bader

Group Captain Sir Douglas Bader CBE, DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar, DL, FRAeS, was born in London on 21 February 1910. Unable to afford to go to university, Bader learned of six annual prize cadetships offered by RAF Cranwell. He applied, and was placed fifth in the competitive examinations and admitted to the Royal Air Force College in 1928.

He was commissioned as a Pilot Officer on July 26, 1930, and posted to 23 Squadron at Kenley, flying Bristol Bulldogs. Standing orders were to avoid aerobatics at less than 2,000 feet, but on 14 December 1931, he attempted a series of low altitude manoeuvres over Woodley Aerodrome. His left wing hit the ground and his Bulldog crashed. Bader survived but had both his legs amputated, and was medically discharged from the RAF in April 1933.

At the outbreak of war he volunteered for active service and his persistence eventually gave him an assessment at the Central Flying School. Proving his skill, he did refresher training and in January 1940 was posted to 19 Squadron flying Spitfires at Duxford.

After displaying his leadership qualities, he was then moved to 222 Squadron and promoted to Flight Lieutenant. During the Battle of France and the Dunkirk evacuation Bader was in combat and on 1 June, he scored his first kill, a Messerschmitt Bf 109, over Dunkirk.

He was then promoted to Squadron Leader and given command of 232 Squadron flying Hurricanes. Largely composed of inexperienced Canadians it had suffered heavy losses over France. Bader quickly rebuilt the Squadron's morale and it became operational on 9 July, in time for the Battle of Britain. He soon scored his first

kill with the Squadron when he downed a Dornier Do 17 of the Norfolk coast.

On 14 September, Bader received the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his performance through the late summer. On December 12, Bader was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his efforts during the Battle of Britain. In the course of the fighting, 232 Squadron had downed 62 enemy aircraft. He was also a proponent of the 12 Group 'Big Wing' which he led several times in combat.

In March 1941, he was promoted to command the Tangmere Wing of 145, 610, and 616 Squadrons. Flying the Spitfire again, Bader led offensive fighter sweeps and escort missions over the Continent. Through the summer Bader continued to add to his score and was awarded a bar for his DSO on 2 July. Although his Wing was now flagging he still pressed for more operations to be flown.

On August 9, he engaged a group of Bf 109s over northern France. His Spitfire was hit, with the rear of the aircraft breaking away, which may have been caused by friendly fire. In the course of baling out Bader lost one of his artificial legs. He was captured and became a POW. Bader's score then stood at 22 kills and six probables.

He proved to be a troublesome prisoner and was incarcerated in Colditz. Bader remained there until liberated by the US First Army in April 1945. Returning to Britain, he was given the honour of leading the first Battle of Britain flypast over London in June, which operated from North Weald. Returning to active duty, he briefly oversaw the Fighter Leader's School before leading the North Weald Sector of 11 Group. But he was not comfortable in his new role and decided to leave the RAF in June 1946 for a job with Royal Dutch Shell. He died on 5 September 1982.



*King George VI congratulates Flight-Lieutenant Alan Deere, on decorating him with the Distinguished Flying Cross at Hornchurch in 1940.*

## Alan Deere

Air Commodore Alan Deere DSO, OBE, DFC\*, was born on 12 December 1917 in Auckland, New Zealand. He passed selection for entry into the RAF in April 1937 and sailed for England, where he began flying training on 28 October 1937.

On 9 January 1938 he was granted a short service commission as a Pilot Officer. After successfully completing his pilot training he joined first 74 Squadron, then 54 Squadron at Hornchurch. Both Squadrons were flying Gloster Gladiators, converting to Spitfires in 1939.

He took part in the battles over France in May and June 1940, having some success, but was shot down over Dunkirk on 28 May. After a forced landing, he managed to join the evacuation, coming back on a destroyer.

He was presented with the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) on 12 June 1940 by King George VI at Hornchurch. He took part in the desperate fighting during the Battle of Britain and was shot down several times, and was awarded a Bar to his DFC on 6 September.

The Squadron was then rested at Catterick and he became a ground controller at the end of his operational tour. He returned to active duty on 7 May 1941 when he joined 602 Squadron at Ayr as a flight commander. At the end of July he was promoted to Commanding Officer, and the Squadron went south to Kenley. In January 1942 he was sent to the USA on a lecture tour as a rest.

Returning to the UK he was posted as Commanding Officer to 403 (Canadian) Squadron at North Weald at the beginning of May. In August he was sent on a staff course and then to HQ 13 Group. His next operational posting was to command the Biggin Hill Wing. In the course of this tour he flew 121

sorties and received a Distinguished Service Order.

In September 1943 he took over command of the of the Central Gunnery School's Fighter Wing at Sutton Bridge. He subsequently commanded of the Free French fighter wing on D-Day and for its return to France. He was later posted to HQ 84 Group Control Centre as Wing Commander Plans until July 1945 when he became Station Commander at Biggin Hill. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire in June 1945.

At the end of the war Deere was given command of the Polish P-51 Mustang Wing at Andrewsfield, where it disbanded in October. He was then appointed as Station Commander at Duxford, and granted a permanent commission as a Squadron Leader in September 1945. Two years later he went to Malta on the headquarters staff. From there he joined the Headquarters of 61 Group before becoming Operations Officer, North-Eastern Sector, at Linton-on-Ouse.

He was promoted to Wing Commander in July 1951, and became Commanding Officer of RAF North Weald in 1952. In 1955 he was on the staff of the RAF Staff College. He was promoted to Group Captain on 1 January 1958. He served as Aide-de-camp to the Queen from 22 March 1961 to 30 June 1964, and was appointed Assistant Commandant of the RAF College, Cranwell, in February 1963.

Deere took command of 12 (East Anglian) Sector of Fighter Command on 25 March 1964, and was promoted to Air Commodore on 1 July. In 1966 he commanded No. 1 School of Technical Training at RAF Halton. Deere retired from the Royal Air Force on 12 December 1967. He died on 21 September 1995 aged 78.



Robert 'Bob' Stanford Tuck



Wilhelm Mohr



## Robert 'Bob' Stanford Tuck

Wing Commander Robert 'Bob' Stanford Tuck, DSO, DFC\*\*, AFC was born on 1 July 1915. He joined the RAF on a Short Service Commission in 1935. In May 1940, he was posted to 92 Squadron at Croydon, as a Flight Commander flying Spitfires. His first combat sorties were during the Battle of France, over Dunkirk, where he claimed his first successes, and was awarded his first DFC on 11 June.

On 11 September, during the height of the Battle of Britain, he was promoted to command the Hurricane-equipped 257 Squadron at Coltishall. He received a Bar to his DFC in October, when the squadron came to North Weald from Martlesham Heath.

In July, 1941, he was appointed as Wing Leader at Duxford where he led fighter sweeps into northern France. After a posting to the USA as part of an operational rest period, he returned to command the Biggin Hill Wing.

On 28 January 1942, he was shot down on a low level fighter sweep near Boulogne and became a POW. His captors spotted one of his 20mm cannon shells had passed directly down the barrel of an similar sized anti-aircraft gun and had exploded inside, peeling open the barrel. They thought this hilarious.

He then spent several years in *Stalag Luft III* at Sagan, where he missed the Great Escape because he was sent to another camp. He finally managed to escape on 1 February 1945 by arranging to be left behind in a barn as other POWs continued their forced march westwards, and spent some time fighting alongside Russian troops before being repatriated.

His was credited with 27 aircraft destroyed along with two shared, and six probables. He retired from the RAF in 1949 and became a test pilot with English Electric. He died on 5 May 1987 at the age of 70.

## Wilhelm Mohr

Lieutenant General Wilhelm Mohr was born at Fana near Bergen on 27 June 1917 and joined the Army Air Arm in 1936, learning to fly at the Kjeller Flight School. He then

attended the Army Academy to study engineering.

In 1939 he was posted to the Trøndelag Air Unit at Værnes, Trondheim, as Deputy Commander of the Reconnaissance Wing. When the Germans attacked at on 9 April 1940, it was realised that operations from Værnes would not be practical. Skis were fitted to the aircraft so that they could operate off base, and the Wing flew south east to Selbu.

By the end of April it was obvious the southern Norway could not be held. Pilots were given the option of retiring to the north of the country to continue the fight or prepare for evacuation to Britain from Lesja to organise future resistance.

Lieutenant Mohr chose to be evacuated. He subsequently escaped by sea from Molde on 2 May. He then departed for the Norwegian training camp 'Little Norway' in Toronto, Canada, where he became the first flight instructor.

Promoted to Captain, he returned to the UK in May 1941. He was first posted to 615 Squadron for combat experience, joining 332 (Norwegian) Squadron in January 1942 as a Flight Commander. In April he became its Commanding Officer.

The Squadron moved to North Weald from Catterick in June. In July he was wounded when a shell fired by a Focke Wulf 190 hit the left cannon of his Spitfire. He crash landed back at North Weald. A fragment had passed through his oxygen mask and cheek, removing a tooth. In August he took part in the Dieppe raid, and was hit by a bullet in his ankle.

After a rest as Head of Personnel at the Air Force Joint Headquarters, he became the administrative leader of the 132 (Norwegian) Wing in time for D-Day. The Wing later moved to France as part of 2nd Tactical Air Force, and ended the war at Twente in Holland.

Mohr was aide-de-camp to King Haakon VII from 1946-49, and played an important role in building up the newly-established Royal Norwegian Air Force (RNoAF), serving in various postings in the RNoAF in the 1950s, until he became Chief of Staff of the Air Force in 1960. He became Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force in 1963 with the rank of Lieutenant General and retired in 1975. He died on 26 September 2017 aged 99 years. ■

# Mascots and the camp followers

## Remembering the menageries that belonged to most squadrons...

Animals, especially dogs have long been a part of military life. where strays have often been befriended by pilots and groundcrew. We feature several of our Squadrons below and the dogs, birds and other animals that they have adopted.

### 249 Squadron – Pipsqueak and Wilfred

P/O William Millington introduced a small black and white terrier called *Pipsqueak* to 249 Squadron in 1940. The dog features in many photos of the pilots taken at the time.

*Pipsqueak* was joined shortly afterwards by a white 'duck' called *Wilfred*, who was really quite tame and spent time swimming in the small stream behind the Squadron's dispersal, where pilots also used to race paper boats.

Both mascots enjoyed going to the *King's Head* in the village with their pilots. Apparently *Wilfred* was partial to Best Bitter, subsequently leaving his 'calling card' once he'd had his fill! Tom Neil mentions a number of Squadron kittens as well.

(*Pipsqueak* was the code name of a device attached to a fighter's radio which transmitted at fixed intervals to assist in direction finding. *Pip*, *Squeak* and *Wilfred* were also cartoon characters in a *Daily Mirror* strip from 1919 to 1956. *Pip* was a dog, *Squeak* a penguin and *Wilfred* a rabbit.)

### A Flight, 222 Squadron – Peter

A Flight of 222 Squadron, which arrived at North Weald in August 1941, had a dog called *Peter* on its strength who belonged to F/Lt Eric Thomas. The picture shows Peter and members of the Flight at Coltishall in March 1941, before they moved across to 11 Group.

### 121 (Eagle) Squadron – Roger

There are several photographs of Eagle Squadron dogs at different RAF stations. The dog shown here is *Roger*, and the picture was taken during a detachment by 121 Squadron to Rochford from North Weald in early 1942. *Roger* had been adopted following the demise of his original owner, as happened so many times during the war on all sides.

### 331 (Norwegian) Squadron – Varg

The Norwegians also welcomed some canine friends. 331 Squadron's mascot was an Alsatian called *Varg* (Wolf). He is pictured here with his friendly rival – 332 Squadron's



249 Squadron's duck *Wilfred* and terrier *Pipsqueak*, who were great friends. The pilot in the French Air Force uniform is Lieutenant Georges Perrin who was shot down flying the Gate Guardian Hurricane V7313 in October 1940. He baled out and survived. *Pipsqueak* was later taken over by 71 (Eagle) Squadron as their mascot when 249 Squadron was posted to Malta in 1941.



222 Squadron and Peter at Coltishall before coming to North Weald



121 (Eagle) Squadron pilots F/Sgt Kelly and F/O Osbourne with Roger on detachment at Rochford in 1942



Friendly rivals – Mads the goat and Varg

mascot *Mads* the goat. *Varg* had been bought by John Nordmo in 1941 when the Squadron was based in the



332 Squadron cat



Troy and her Handler in 2012

Orkneys and later followed it across Europe with 2 TAF after the D-Day invasion, and finally on to Norway.

### 332 (Norwegian) Squadron – Mads the goat

As well as the usual dogs, 332 (Norwegian) Squadron had a goat called *Mads* as a mascot. He had double red and a single blue stripe painted around its horns to represent the Norwegian flag just like the cannon housings and spinners.

*Mads* was no respecter of authority, even King Haakon himself. He was very smelly and generally regarded as a

menace by everybody except the pilots of 332. He met his end by being 'accidentally' shot one night by a sentry, after he was 'mistaken' for an Airfield intruder. Another of 332 Squadron's mascots was a Jack Russell Terrier called *Spit*, and there was also at least one Squadron tabby cat, possibly one of the former 249 Squadron kittens which got passed on.

### 111 Squadron's tragic dogs

Treble One Squadron's groundcrew from the 1950s at the Airfield recalled an incident where two dogs owned by pilots were killed by a fuel bowser on the same day. One died instantly, the other after it had limped back to its quarters.

Two weeks later, on 7 June 1957, the two pilots were involved in a mid-air collision during an aerobatic display rehearsal near North Weald. One of the Hunters managed to land successfully at Stansted on its longer runway. The other crashed onto the Epping-Ongar railway at North Weald. The pilot, F/O David Garrett, was killed.

The track was badly damaged by wreckage and a steam train derailed. Three of the 20 passengers were slightly injured and the driver, Arthur Green, was commended for his actions.

### 56 Squadron – Troy and its more recent dogs

Our longest serving unit is 56 Squadron. When they laid up their first standard in St Andrew's Church on 16 September 2012, they brought their mascot of the time *Troy*, a 17-year-old Red-tailed Hawk, and her handler to take part in the Squadron photograph by the Gate Guardian after the service.

There is also famous World War 1 picture of the Squadron's pilots taken alongside their SE5 fighters with some of their dogs. During the Freedom of the District Parade in 2018

the Squadron posed for a similar picture with their current dogs, again by the Gate Guardian. ■



56 Squadron and their dogs in 2018!





# North Weald on the Silver Screen

## Films made at the Airfield...

### The Battle of Britain (1969)

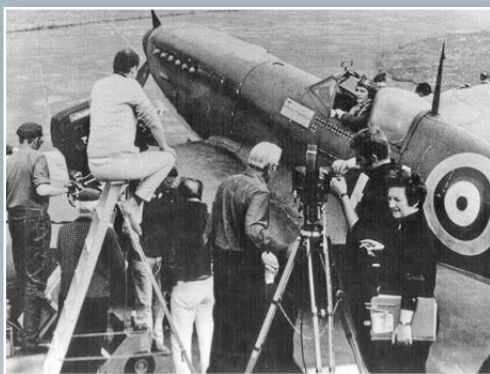
This famous production directed by Guy Hamilton was filmed in part at North Weald and Duxford, where a hangar was blown up to simulate an air raid, Debden and Hawkinge. Tablada in Spain was used for many of the *Luftwaffe* sequences, and filming was also done from Hal Far and Luqa in Malta because of the uncertain British weather.

Group Captain Hamish Mahaddie located 12 airworthy Spitfires. There were also six Hawker Hurricanes, of which three were flying and one able to taxi.

During the actual battle, all RAF Spitfires were Mark Is or Mark IIs. However, only two could be made airworthy, so the producers used seven later marks, which were modified to make the Spitfires look similar, including adding elliptical wingtips and period canopies. A pair of two-seat trainer Spitfires were used as camera platforms to achieve realistic aerial footage inside the battle scenes.

For the German aircraft, the producers obtained 32 CASA 2.111 twin-engined bombers, a Spanish-built version of the German Heinkel He 111. They also located 27 Hispano *Buchon* single-engined fighters, a Spanish version of the German Messerschmitt Bf 109. The *Buchons* were altered to look more like correct Bf 109Es by adding dummy machine guns, cannon and tailplane struts, and removing the rounded wingtips. A two-seat version was also used.

Arthur Moreton Collection



Arthur Moreton Collection

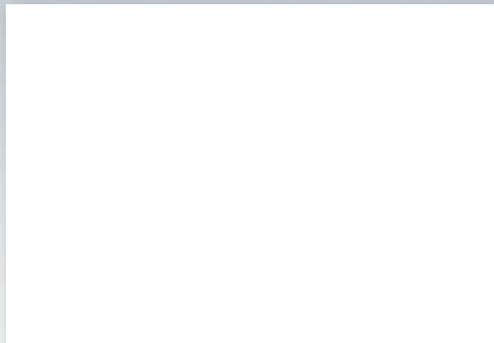
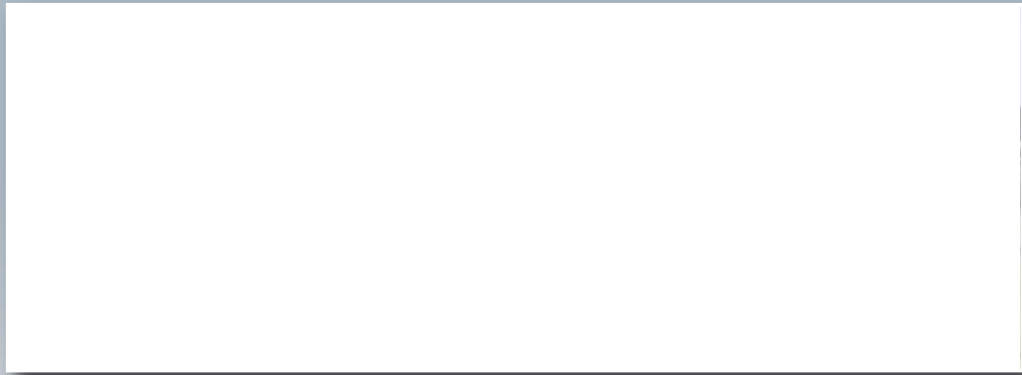


The scenes filmed at North Weald included pilots sitting around and entering a dispersal hut, which was created where Hangar 4a now stands.

The air raids were filmed from the corner of the taxiway next to the Hangar 6 Apron facing towards Hangar 4; from Hangar 4a looking across the Airfield towards Hangar 1 and also Hangar 2. Our iconic poplar trees and revetments show up clearly. Another scene shows a wooden hut being blown up by a direct hit.







## Band of Brothers (2001)

The ten-part television series produced by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks was based around the dramatised history of *Easy Company*, which formed part of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. It charts the Company's progress from basic training to combat up until the end of World War 2 in Europe. The series drew on the

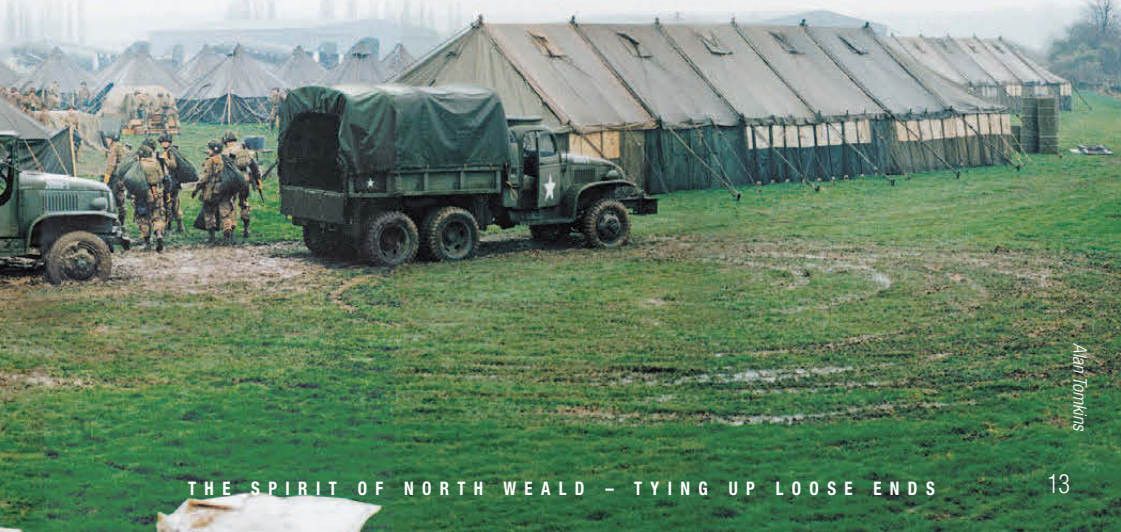
1992 book by Stephen E Ambrose as well as interviews with the Company's surviving veterans.

Much of the action was filmed at Hatfield, utilising part of the set created for the film *Saving Private Ryan*. North Weald was used to represent RAF Uppottery in Devon, where the Company departed in C-47s for Normandy on the eve of D-Day. This featured in Part 2 of the series.

Hangar 6 was used for the briefing scene as well as Runway 12/30 where the paratroopers are seen preparing their kit. The grass area alongside Hangar 39, which is shown below, was a tented camp.

Numerous C-47s were placed around the Airfield. Some of these were cleverly-constructed flat dummies of aircraft. Several C-47s were used for the flying sequence, and were filmed taxiing out and taking off on Runway 02.

The Art Director was Alan Tomkins, who recreated the paint schemes for the aircraft, the paratroopers' kit and uniforms as well as story boards for the scenes. He had a bit part himself, playing a Dutch priest at the liberation of Eindhoven. ■



# Recalling visits by the Norwegians

## North Weald has great historical significance for members of the Royal Norwegian Air Force

The Royal Norwegian Air Force and its veterans from 331 and 332 Squadrons and 132 Wing have visited North Weald on many occasions over the years. Here we recall some of the links that the Norwegians have retained with the local community to mark the 80th anniversary of their arrival here back in May 1942.

### **The Airfield's 90th anniversary, August 2006**

An F-16 from both 331 and 332 Squadrons along with the Chief of the Norwegian Air Staff and the Wing Commander of 132 Wing at Bodø flew in to mark the Airfield's 90th anniversary in August 2006.

### **The Community Day, September 2009**

Two F-16s from 331 and 332 Squadrons escorted the King of Norway's Falcon carrying a contingent of wartime veterans from the two Squadrons. came in for the Airfield's Community Day in September 2009. They were joined by a Vampire

### **The King's Guard and veterans visit, May 2010**

A group of wartime veterans of all services with servicemen and women and the drums and bugles of the King's Guard laid wreaths at the Norwegian Obelisk as part of their tour of the UK in May 2010.



*The General inspects local Air Cadets in 2006*



*The King's Guard Drums and Bugles at the Norwegian Obelisk in 2010*



*Local school children and veterans with 332 Squadron Spitfire ML407*

*An F-16 arrives in 2006*





The two F-16s, the King of Norway's Falcon and the Norwegian Air Force Historical Squadron's Vampire perform a flypast before departing in 2009



General Mohr's final visit to the Air Fête in 2016



Squadron bar was also renamed *The Norwegian Wing* in their honour. The working party's task was to complete the *Little Norway* memorial and revetment at The Squadron ready for its dedication.

The Grace Spitfire, ML407, was also on hand as it had served with 332 Squadron and had been part of its final wartime mission. One of the veterans, Rolf Kolling, had also flown on that same sortie.

### **The 100th Anniversary Air Fête, July 2016**

The Norwegian Falcon DA20ECM flew in General Wilhelm Mohr as our guest-of-honour for the *Air Fête* in July 2016 to mark the Airfield's 100th anniversary. Sadly this was to be his last visit as he died that September aged 99.

While it is inevitable that veterans will gradually pass away, their families still retain an interest in North Weald where their fathers, grandfathers and uncles served so well.

### **The 75th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Norwegian Air Force, July 2019**

Chief of The Royal Norwegian Air Force, Major General Tonje Skinnarland, accompanied by Norway's Military Attaché to the UK and members of 331 and 332 Squadrons, visited the Airfield on Monday 15 July 2019 to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Norwegian Air Force in November 1944. She laid a wreath at the Norwegian Obelisk before visiting the Squadron's Little Norway revetment, followed by lunch in the Norwegian Wing bar. ■



General Skinnarland's visit in 2019

### **Norwegian Wings over North Weald, September 2012**

Two F-16s and a C-130 Hercules carrying veterans, the Chief of the Norwegian Air Staff and a working party came in for the *Norwegian Wings over North Weald* Community Day in September 2012 to mark the 70th anniversary of the Norwegian Squadrons first arriving at North Weald. The

# Water, water everywhere!

## How airmen from RAF North Weald helped to rebuild coastal defences during the East Coast flood disaster of January 1953...

On the night of 31 January 1953, the east coast of England was devastated by some of the worst floods in living memory. They were caused by a major storm surge which coincided with the highest spring tide for eighty years, causing destruction to coastal areas throughout Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Kent and the Thames Estuary.

307 people died along with over 22,000 farm animals and 34,000 poultry, 24,000 homes were damaged or destroyed and over 30,000 people evacuated. More than 200 major industrial facilities were under water including 200 miles of railway, twelve gas works and two power stations.

RAF North Weald played its part in responding to the disaster, with 100 airmen working twelve-hour shifts for the next seventeen days. The aim was for the contingent to rebuild defences with sandbags around Tilbury and Purfleet before the next high tides were due. The weather remained bad, with blizzards, hail and sleet storms.

Their efforts were part of a massive effort, *Operation Canute*, which included 1,500 officers and airmen from various RAF stations, contingents from local army and naval bases and US airmen from Wethersfield. Crews from Bomber Command flew 70 sorties with Lancasters of 82 Squadron along with two Mosquito squadrons to photograph the floods and their aftermath from Margate to the Humber over the course of six days as part of a separate *Operation Floodlight*. Three Dragonfly helicopters of 705 Squadron were also used to deliver supplies to areas cut off by the floods.

Geoff Monahan was one of the North Weald airmen involved, and recounted his experiences in Volume III of Tom Docherty's trilogy *Swift to Battle*: "We were taken to a council depot where there were large piles of sand and sandbags. Acting in twos we filled a bag each, and, as directed, took a path to the river bank. 'Go along the bank,' we had been told, 'and drop your bag in the gap you'll find, and then repeat the exercise.'

"Off we went. We found the gap, you could hardly miss it! It seemed about a hundred yards wide, with water pouring



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Thurrock Museum

through like Niagara Falls into various industrial premises. Dutifully we dropped our bags, to see them disappear, and then headed back for more. A similar exercise was taking place on the other side of the gap. For quite a few hours we kept this up without much break before being returned to North Weald, tired and very dirty.

"The exercise was repeated for the next few days, at both Purfleet and Tilbury, including both day and night shifts in often poor weather. Soon barges were brought in. They would be filled with sandbags, tie up to the bank and wait for us. The method was, you slithered down the bank to one end of the barge (it could be dark and snowing), walk around the narrow walkway, be handed up a bag, climb the bank at the other end of the barge, go dump your bag and then repeat the exercise."

The night shift usually got a tot of Navy rum, which had originally been organised by 72 Squadron's adjutant Bert Sweetman, and was gratefully received to help fight the chill of the cold weather. He recalled many people displaying the 'Blitz spirit' and refusing to leave their homes despite the several feet of flood water washing down the streets.

The waters eventually subsided and people began to clear up the mess and rebuild their shattered lives. The airmen from North Weald had worked hard to assist them in their hour of need.

Today, resilience to disaster is still a concern for the emergency services and local councils. ■