

Lawrence George Belchem attended Crewkerne School and joined the RAF College Cranwell in September 1928 as a Flight Cadet. He graduated in December 1930 and was posted to 19 Squadron at Duxford. On 4th June 1933 Belchem went to 204 (Flying Boat) Squadron at Plymouth and moved to 3 FTS Grantham on 3rd July 1934 as an instructor.

His next posting was to a course at RAF Gosport on 1st September 1935 and on 23rd October 1936 he joined 824 (Fleet Spotter-Reconnaissance) Squadron, based on HMS Hermes in the Far East. Belchem went to 5 OTU on 7th June 1940 for a refresher course. He flew only one operational sortie during the Battle of Britain period, a convoy patrol with 264 Squadron on 18th July 1940, with Sgt. A Berry as gunner. He was not on the strength of the squadron for this sortie. He was killed over 14/15th July 1942 as a Squadron Leader with 119 Squadron, operating in Catalinas from Lough Erne. His Catalina, AH545, failed to return from an Atlantic Patrol. It was this aircraft, with a different crew, that had spotted the German battleship Bismarck on 26th May 1941. Belchem is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial, Panel 65.

BOYS OWN ANNUAL - HIS PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF TRAINING

Training Air Pilots

An Afternoon at Cranwell

By L. G. BELCHEM

(With sketches by W. OLIVER)

IMAGINE a vast open tract of land bordered on three sides by roads and on the fourth by huts and buildings, which include four huge hangars, repair and maintenance shops, stores depôts, workshops, etc., and you will have some idea of Cranwell Air Station, the training centre in Lincolnshire where would-be pilots of the Royal Air Force undergo their course of instruction as Flight Cadets.

The aerodrome itself is one of the largest in England, being more than one and a half miles long and over half-a-mile wide. The four hangars which house the thirty odd machines used for training purposes stand on the north side of the main landing-ground, with the huts and other buildings behind them, while still further to the north is the Service 'drome reserved for fully-fledged pilots.

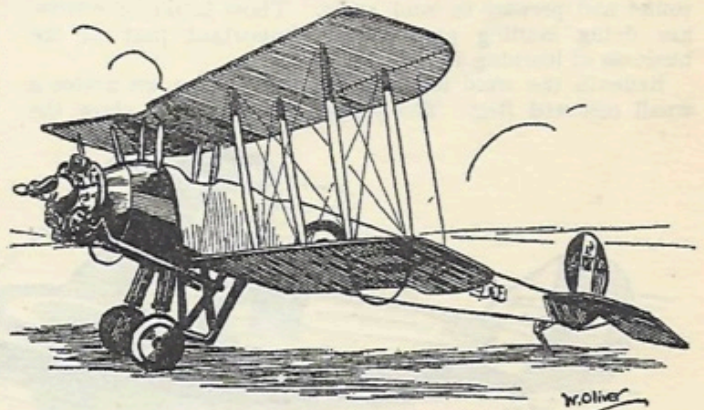
Let us suppose that we are having a look-round at Cranwell on any fine afternoon at about one o'clock. The training machines are lined up on the tarmac outside the hangars, and we notice that there are four different types, the Avro Lynx predominating, and the others being the Bristol Fighter, De Havilland 9A, and Siskin.

The Avro Lynx is the preliminary training machine, the craft in which the (sometimes unhappy!) pupil takes to the air for the first time. After having become fully proficient in handling an Avro, the pupil passes on to the Bristol Fighter, commonly termed a "Biff," and after that to the D.H. 9A, one of the older types, in use during the war, and easily recognisable by its curious radiator, which rather resembles that of a large lorry! Then finally the pupil, if considered expert enough, learns to fly the Siskin, which is at present the standard single-seater fighter in the Service.

It is about 1.15 now, and the 'drome, which was practically deserted when we arrived, is beginning to wake up. Aircraftmen in overalls appear and bustle about, wheeling the 'planes (or "'buses" as they are familiarly termed) into their places facing "into wind"—a precaution necessary to prevent the machines being blown over if the wind is rather high. Two "Hucks starters" are busy

starting up the engines of the various 'planes, which are then ready for the afternoon's work.

Soon pupils and instructors appear. The day is warm, so the Sidcot flying suit is not much in evidence, overalls being worn instead, plus the other impedimenta of flying, comprising the parachutes (which are used as seats), helmets, and goggles. Each helmet is equipped with a pair of earphones from which lead two rubber tubes, each about



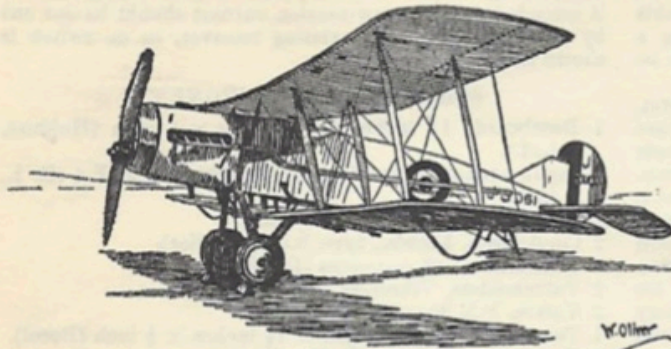
Avro Lynx.

a foot in length, joined to the upper arms of a metal Y-piece. The lower arm of the Y-piece is fitted into another tube, installed in the cockpit, to the further end of which a mouth-piece is fitted. This arrangement enables instructor and pupil to converse easily, unimpeded by the roar of the engine.

Now the afternoon's flying practice is about to begin. An instructor and his pupil cross the tarmac and climb into a waiting Avro, the instructor in the front cockpit and the pupil in the rear one. The safety belt is done up, the telephone duly connected and everything made shipshape.

The engine and controls are then tested, chocks waved away, and the 'bus taxied clear of the other machines and out into the open 'drome.

The instructor takes a last look at the wind indicator,



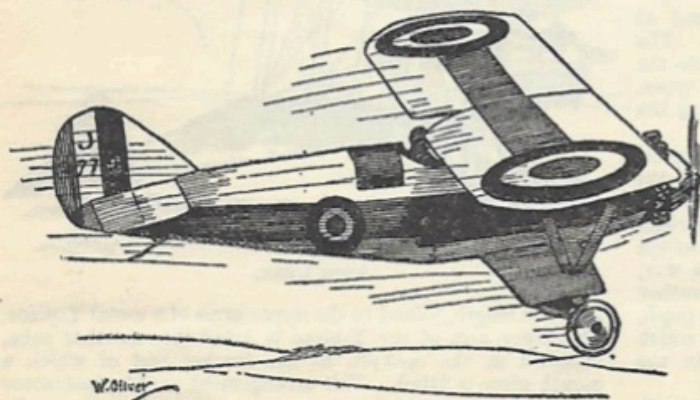
Bristol Fighter.

and glances round the cockpit to make sure that everything is in order. Then mechanics who are holding on to the tips of the lower wing are waved away (a salute from one of them indicating that there are no other machines in the way) and the 'plane taxies forward into the wind. Bouncing across the 'drome till flying speed is attained, she then lifts and climbs smoothly away into the blue.

Whilst we have been watching this particular pupil and his instructor, other 'planes have taxied out and taken off in similar fashion. One by one they go till the landing ground is deserted but for two big, green Handley-Page "Hyderabad," twin-engined night-bombers that happen to be visiting Cranwell from another aerodrome.

Each of the training machines, on gaining sufficient height, swings round to the right. Some then climb still higher and fly away from the landing-ground to practise various manœuvres at a safe distance from the 'drome (thus avoiding the risk of accidents resulting from undue congestion of aircraft in a small area). The remainder simply sweep right round and prepare to land again. These latter, of course, are doing landing practice—an important part of the business of learning to fly!

Beneath the wind indicator on the 'drome we notice a small coloured flag. The purpose of this is to show the



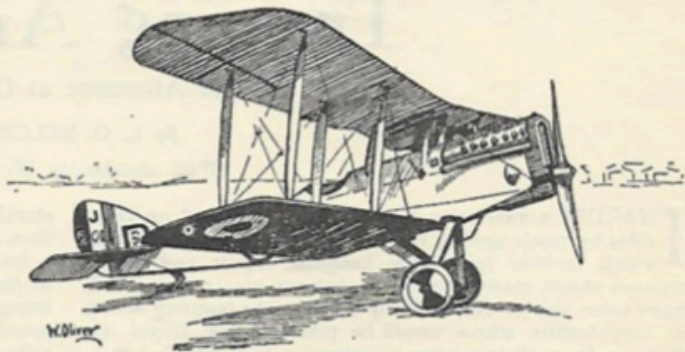
Siskin Single-Seater Fighter.

direction of the circuit which is to be made after taking off from the aerodrome—a red flag for a left-hand circuit and a blue flag for a right-hand circuit. To-day it is the blue flag that is in evidence, indicating to the pilots that a right-hand circuit is to be made.

Among the machines coming in to land we notice a two-seater Siskin. The standard Siskins, of course, are single-seater fighters, but for training purposes these are fitted with an extra cockpit so that an instructor can go up with the pupil. The Siskin makes a good landing (which is not particularly easy to do on this type of machine), but a D. H. 9A which follows a few moments later hits the ground wheels first and bounces across the 'drome in a very jolty fashion—a bad landing, that! The correct way to land is "wheels and tail together"; that is, the tail-skid and the rubber-tyred wheels should touch the ground simultaneously. Provided this is effected so that the machine drops on to the ground from a height of about 6 inches, the landing will be smooth and gentle, but if the machine drops from, say, 18 inches it "pancakes" down with an unpleasant jolt.

Now an Avro has landed a short distance in front of the hangars. We notice that the instructor is getting out, so evidently the cadet is going solo—off into the blue alone! He taxies his Avro out ready to take off, then as he opens out his engine to a roar the 'bus skims across the ground, lifts, climbs, and swings round in a right-hand circuit, on the completion of which the pupil throttles his engine down and glides into land.

The machine is, however, at such an altitude that a straight glide would take it well down the 'drome where the



D. H. 9A.

instructor, who is watching from one of the hangars, could not see the landing properly, so the pilot swings the nose of the machine round and side-slips, coming down sideways after the manner of a crab. This is a method of losing height rapidly without gaining much forward space. At about 40 feet above the ground the pupil resumes his glide, and at about 20 feet begins to "flatten out," judging the distance so that he lands gently in front of the hangars.

A few minutes later he takes off again, climbing straight away from the 'drome until, swinging round, he passes upwards through a cloud bank and disappears, to carry out various evolutions.

Glancing round the sky, we can see several 'planes performing aerobatics. One, for instance, is coming down in a spin, another is just completing his third loop in succession, a third is doing half-rolls, and yet another is gliding down in a series of S-bends, practising forced landings.

Now the first period of flying practice is over, and one by one the homeward-bound 'planes are coming into land, like bees returning to the hive. One after another they drop to the ground and taxi right up to the petrol dumps until the latter are ringed by machines with tanks waiting to be filled. When all are home, flying kit is put away, flying log-books filled up, parachutes returned to store, and the cadets who have been flying march away to some other of their various activities, while a fresh batch of cadets take their places in the machines.



"Roar" Looseleaf Books 138 Sp. 42074
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COLLEGE SEQUENCE NUMBER 473.		CHRISTIAN NAMES LAWRENCE GEORGE.		SURNAME BELCHEM.	
BORN	DATE 5/10/10	NATIONALITY English.	DATE	RELIGION Church of England.	DATE
JOINED COLLEGE	6/9/28	ORDER OF MERIT ON JOINING -		NO. IN CLASS ON JOINING 23.	
LEFT COLLEGE	19/12/30	ORDER OF MERIT ON LEAVING 17.		NO. IN CLASS ON LEAVING 24.	
PROMOTED		JOINED		DROPPED	
CADET CORPORAL		1ST CLASS	7/9/28	AFTER II TERM	
CADET SERGEANT		2ND CLASS	11/1/29 6/9/29	Rusticated.	
UNDER OFFICER		3RD CLASS	17/1/30	AFTER TERM	
		4TH CLASS	5/9/30		
COMMISSIONED IN R.A.F. 20/12/30		REASON FOR WITHDRAWAL IF COURSE NOT COMPLETED			
NAME OF PARENT OR NEXT OF KIN Mrs. E.R. Skinner. (Aunt).			ADDRESS 6, Routh Road, Wandsworth Common, S.W.18.		
PROFESSION OF PARENT OR NEXT OF KIN Father: Lieutenant, deceased. (Northumberland Fusiliers).			CHANGE OF ADDRESS		
WHERE EDUCATED Crewkerne, Somerset.					
PRIZES, ETC., ON JOINING King's Cadet.			PRIZES, ETC., ON LEAVING		
REMARKS AND FURTHER HISTORY Posted to No. 19 (F) Squadron, R.A.F., Duxford, w.e.f. 20/12/30. A.M.P.L. No. 16/1931 dated 20/1/31. Promotions: Flying Officer 20/6/32. Flight Lieutenant 1/4/36. Squadron Leader 1/12/38. Reported MISSING - A.M. Casualty List No. 165 dated 9/10/42. Presumed deceased - 9/10/42 (Air operations - anti-submarine patrol). 15/7/42.					
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