

Thomas Geoffrey Pike 1-24B

Another 'old boy' of Bedford School, he entered the RAF College at Cranwell in 1924 and attained the rank of Flt Cdt Cpl prior to graduating in 1925. He started his flying career as a fighter pilot with No 56 Squadron at Biggin Hill initially flying Gloster Grebes and later Armstrong Whitworth Siskins. Qualifying as an instructor he then served at No 5 FTS, Sealand before returning to the Central Flying School to train instructors. Whilst at the CFS he was a member of the School's five man aerobatic team of Gipsy Moths in 1930. As was the norm in the pre war years, he decided to further his knowledge and experience by training as an engineer which required him to attend the two year Engineering Officer's course at the Home Aircraft Depot, Henlow.

Suitably qualified, he was posted to the Middle East as an engineer. Remaining in the Middle East he returned to training as an instructor at No 4 FTS at Abu Sueir, Egypt. His middle eastern tour completed he was selected to attend the RAF Staff College at Andover, but instead of being posted to a staff position on completion, he returned to flying training, this time as Chief Flying Instructor at Tern Hill. However, in 1939, he received his staff posting which was in the Deputy Directorate of Peace Organisation. When this deputy directorate became superfluous and its functions absorbed in the Directorate of Organisation, he remained until early 1941.

He at last returned to operations as CO of No 219 Squadron, equipped with Beaufighter night fighters at Tangmere. He soon made his mark, shooting down a German aircraft on his very first patrol and a further three night victories brought him a Bar to his DFC which he had won earlier in the year. Having developed some expertise as a night fighter pilot, it was no surprise to find his next posting being as a Staff officer at HQ Fighter Command with responsibility for night fighters. Command of RAF North Weald and a further spell as a staff officer was followed by a posting overseas.

Initially taking command of a mobile operations unit, in early 1944, he was promoted to air commodore and appointed SASO to the Desert Air Force, remaining as such for the remainder of the Italian campaign. On his return to Britain, he assumed command of the Officer's Advanced Training School before once again entering the Air Ministry as Director of Operational Requirements. He held this post during an important period of RAF history as plans were brought to fruition for the replacement of the numerous wartime piston engined aircraft by the new breed of jet powered fighters and later bombers.

However, having overseen the introduction of many new types and prepared the way for the further introduction of others, he returned to study, this time at the Imperial Defence College. Following completion of the IDC course, he returned to the fighter world as AOC, No 11 Group. His first NATO appointment came in 1951 when he assumed the duties of Chief of Staff (Operations) at the, then, HQ in Fontainebleau, France. Returning to the Air Ministry as ?, he was soon appointed Deputy Chief of the Air Staff with a seat on the Air Council following the unfortunate and untimely death of Air Marshal W A D Brook. Having commanded a fighter squadron, station and group, he completed the set when he was appointed AOC in C, Fighter Command in 1956.

At the turn of 1960, he was appointed to the ultimate post in the RAF, that of Chief of the Air Staff. He held the post during a period of major changes in defence policy, such as the scrapping of *Blue Streak*, cancellation of *Skybolt* and the decision to hand over the guardianship of the nuclear deterrent to the Royal Navy. In 1962, he undertook a World Tour visiting RCAF and USAF bases as well as RAF units overseas. During this tour he addressed both the RCAF Staff College and the United States War College. Unlike his predecessors, his spell as CAS did not bring his career to an end, having been offered the post of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander. Accepting the appointment somewhat reluctantly he served for three years, but at the end of it, he knew that his initial reluctance had been proved correct. He died in the RAF Hospital at Halton in 1983.



Oral History

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Content description

British cadet trained as pilot at RAF College, Cranwell, GB, 1923-1925; officer served as pilot with 56 Sqdn, RAF in GB, 1925-1928; attended instructor's course at Central Flying School, RAF Wittering, GB, 1928-1929; served as instructor with No 5 Flying Training School, RAF Sealand and Central Flying School, RAF Wittering, GB, 1929-1930; attended engineering course at RAF Henlow, GB, 1930-1932; served as engineer officer with RAF Depot Middle East, Aboukir, Egypt, 1932-1934; served as instructor with No 4 Flying Training School, Abu Sueir, Egypt, 1934-1937; student at RAF Staff College, Andover, GB, 1937-1938; served as instructor with No 10 Flying Training School, RAF Ternhill, GB, 1938-1939; served as staff officer with Directorate of Organisation at Air Ministry, London, GB, 193

Content description

REEL 1 Recollections of period as cadet at RAF College, Cranwell, GB, 1923-1924: background prior to joining Cranwell; standard of flying instruction; lack of effective selection system; reputation of RAF officers; ground instruction; sporting activities and recreations; behaviour and status of senior cadets; mess arrangements; reasons for cadets leaving course; leave and pay. Recollections of period as pilot with 56 Sqdn, RAF in GB, 1925-1928: posting to squadron at RAF Biggin Hill, 12/1925; replacement of Gloster Glebe with Armstrong Whitworth Siskin.

REEL 2 Continues: role in charge of Transport Section; individual aircraft; attitude to introduction of parachutes; encouragement of pilots to fly as much as possible; quality of squadron leaders and disadvantages if they did not fly; training programme including air gunnery; participation in Hendon Air Displays; drinking habits and influence of First World War veterans; short and permanent commission pilots; move to RAF North Weald, 1/1928; attitude of squadron members to 29 Sqdn, RAF; social life. Aspects of period attending instructor's course at Central Flying School, RAF Wittering, GB, 1928-1929: attitude to posting; effectiveness of course. Aspects of period as instructor with No 5 Flying Training School, RAF Sealand, GB, 1929: posting to unit, 1/1929; effectiveness of CFS system; pupils unable to master flying.

REEL 3 Continues: Aspects of period as instructor with Central Flying School, RAF Wittering, GB, 1929-1930: posting to school, 8/1929; preference for teaching beginners. Aspects of attending engineering course at RAF Henlow, GB, 1930-1932: posting to course; theoretical and practical studies; promotion for Central Flying School and engineering qualifications. Aspects of period as engineering officer with RAF Depot, Middle East, Aboukir, Egypt, 1932-1934: posting to depot, 10/1932; duties and role of workshops; problems with Fairey III's wings; lifestyle; trips to Cairo. Aspects of period as instructor with No 4 Flying Training School, RAF Abu Sueir, Egypt, 1934-1937: background to posting to school, 11/1934; duties and lifestyle; use of bells to indicate time; training Egyptian Air Force pilots; flying training duties in Hawker Harts in desert conditions. Aspects of period as student at RAF Staff College, Andover, GB, 1937-1938: return to GB, 1/1937; combined exercises; visit to Germany.

REEL 4 Continues: impressions of Germany; inter-service relationships. Aspects of period as instructor at No 10 Flying Training School, RAF Ternhill, GB, 1938-1939: posting to school, 1/1938; atmosphere as war approached; initial impressions of early model Supermarine Spitfire. Aspects of period as staff officer with Directorate of Organisation at Air Ministry, London, GB, 1939: duties organising expansion of RAF; amusing story of false alarm on outbreak of Second World War, 3/9/1939.