



# LincolnshireLife





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*Air Vice Marshal F. D. Hughes, CBE, DSO, DFC, AFC, MA, RAF.  
Air Officer Commanding and Commandant, Royal Air Force College, Cranwell.*





The Armorial Bearings of the  
ROYAL AIR FORCE COLLEGE, CRANWELL,  
in the County of Lincoln.

College of Arms,  
January, 1943.

*J. D. Hulston Armstrong*

Chester Herald,  
and Inspector of Royal  
Air Force Badges.



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# The Royal Air Force College Cranwell

## 1920 - 1970

LESLIE HUNT

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**T**O do justice to the glorious history of the Royal Air Force College requires a full-length book and, but for the unfortunate illness of that eminent air historian, John W. R. Taylor (from which, happily, he is now slowly recovering) such a volume would have been available to mark the golden jubilee of the late Viscount Trenchard's equivalent to Dartmouth and Sandhurst "To provide the Service with officers of character and ability, whose education and Service training will enable them progressively to develop their powers and faculties to meet the demands of the highest ranks."

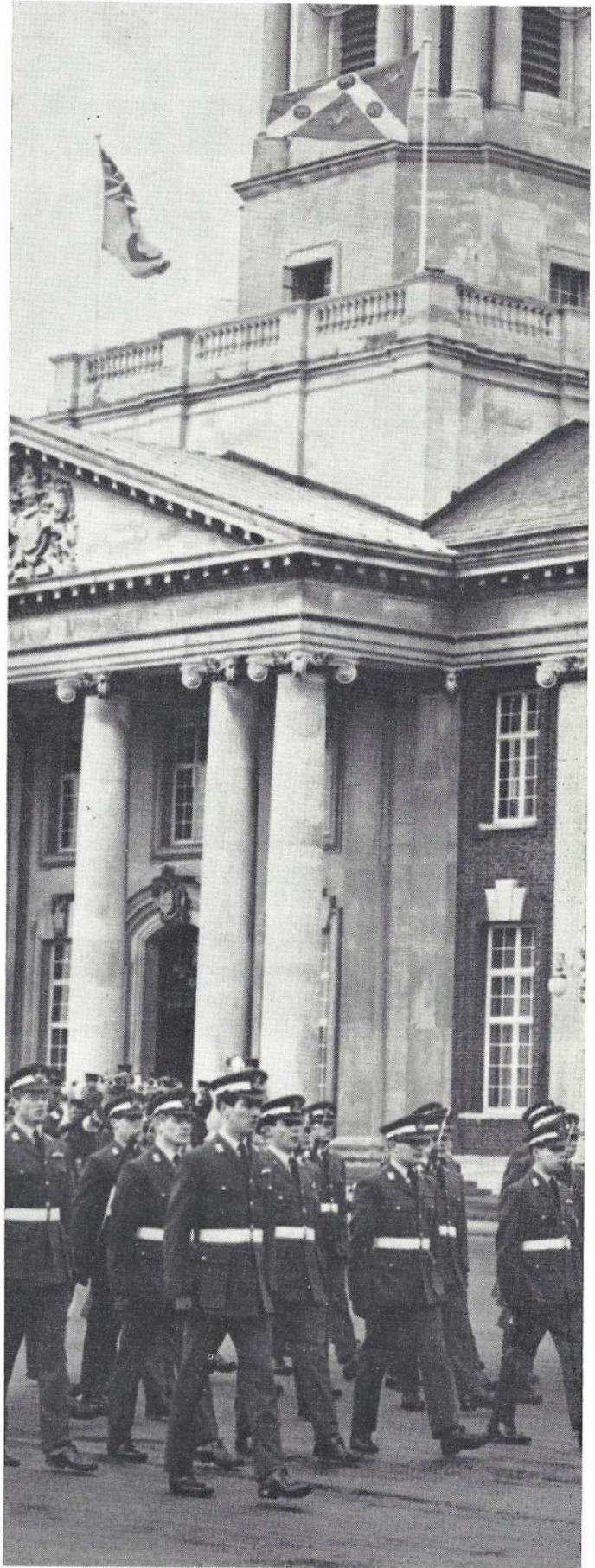
The first course of officer cadets assembled at Cranwell on 5th February, 1920 (a date now celebrated annually as Founders Day) with Air Commodore (later Air Vice-Marshal Sir Charles A. H.) Longcroft as Commandant of the College. Cadets lived and worked in wooden huts to the south of the road running through Cranwell and initially the training was confined to pilots, the first aircraft used being the Avro 504K, the de Havilland DH.9, the Sopwith Snipe, Armstrong Siddeley Atlas and Siskin, with a few Vickers Vimy bombers for wireless-telegraphy training. Later came the dual Bristol Fighter and from 1938 until outbreak of war the Hawker Hart. The Avro 504K had been replaced in 1933 by the Avro Tutor.

### H.R.H. THE DUKE OF YORK

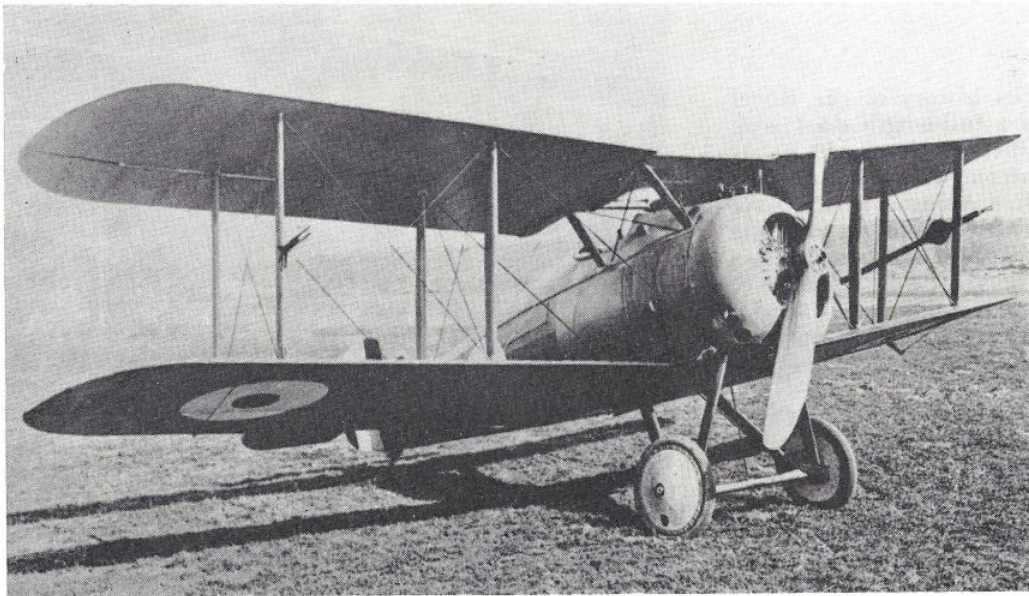
Six weeks after it opened, the College received its first Royal visit when H.R.H. the Duke of York (later George VI) returned to Cranwell where he had himself served at the original unit which, when space is available, will be the subject of a separate article. Visits were also paid during the first College term by interested representatives of Japan, Norway, Spain and Uruguay, to see the first college in the world to train officers for permanent commissions in an air force. The Right Honourable Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State

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Right: Slow march at Graduation Parade of No. 97 Entry, 27th February, 1970.







Top Left: Avro 504K.  
Left: Sopwith Snipe.  
Below: Bristol Fighter.





for War was the Reviewing Officer at the end of the first year and in his speech emphasized that the many skills and sciences needed in an air force required greater ability and knowledge than training of officers in other Services—he also prophesied development of new fuels, substitution of other forms of propulsion, and *vertical flight*. How right he was for, only six years later, Flight Cadet Whittle came to Cranwell and, after leaving submitted a remarkable paper—the starting point of the future Air Commodore Sir Frank Whittle's pioneer work on jet propulsion (the first flight in a British jet-propelled machine, the Gloster-Whittle E.28/39 was appropriately made at Cranwell on 15th May, 1941.) All jet aircraft, civil or military, of the Commonwealth and U.S.A., stemmed from Whittle's invention—and, in a way, from the R.A.F. College, Cranwell. He was the first Old Cranwellian to be knighted and first to be elected Fellow of the Royal Society.

### SCHNEIDER TROPHY

During the first decade, the College made history when on 20th June, 1929, Flight Cadet Neil McKechnie (who had gained a scholarship from Trenchard's other great visionary plan, an Aircraft Apprentice School at Halton) on landing his aircraft at Cranwell, saw another machine (piloted by Flt. Cadet Giles) crash and burst into flames. Without hesitation McKechnie ran to the spot and pulled the injured cadet to safety. For this gallant deed McKechnie received the Empire Gallantry Medal which, on 23rd Sept., 1940, became the George Cross. Giles survived to become a group captain but, alas, after commanding squadrons and stations with distinction, Group Captain McKechnie G.C., lost his life when flying a Lancaster from Metheringham, Lincs., over Königsberg. On the 6th-7th September, 1929, Flight Lieutenant H. R. D. Waghorn, Old Cranwellian, won the Schneider Trophy for this country flying a Supermarine seaplane at an average speed of 328.63 m.p.h.—an early stepping-stone to the war-winning Supermarine Spitfire from the same great designer, R. J. Mitchell.

### PERMANENT COLLEGE

On a snowy afternoon in April, 1929, Lady Maude Hoare, wife of the then-Secretary of State for Air had laid the foundation stone—in the presence of Lord Trenchard—for a permanent College to replace the wartime Naval buildings, the new design reflecting Wren's Royal Chelsea Hospital. A flashing beacon was added on the insistence of the Commandant—approval by Trinity House as it is within 50 miles of the sea! On 11th October, 1934, the Prince of Wales (Duke of Windsor) opened the College and in 1937, King George VI invited cadets to parade at his Coronation and came himself in 1938 for a second visit. On 30th August, 1939, all cadets were recalled from leave and the College closed, to be re-opened straightaway as the R.A.F. College Flying Training School. At this time 44 entries had graduated since 1920 with 1,095 officers passing into the R.A.F., of whom 931 were still on the active list.

Justice cannot be done here to the glorious achievements of Old Cranwellians in World War II and many stirring deeds must wait for the full-length book. Some ex-cadets must, however, be mentioned; foremost inevitably, the late Wing Commander Hugh Gordon

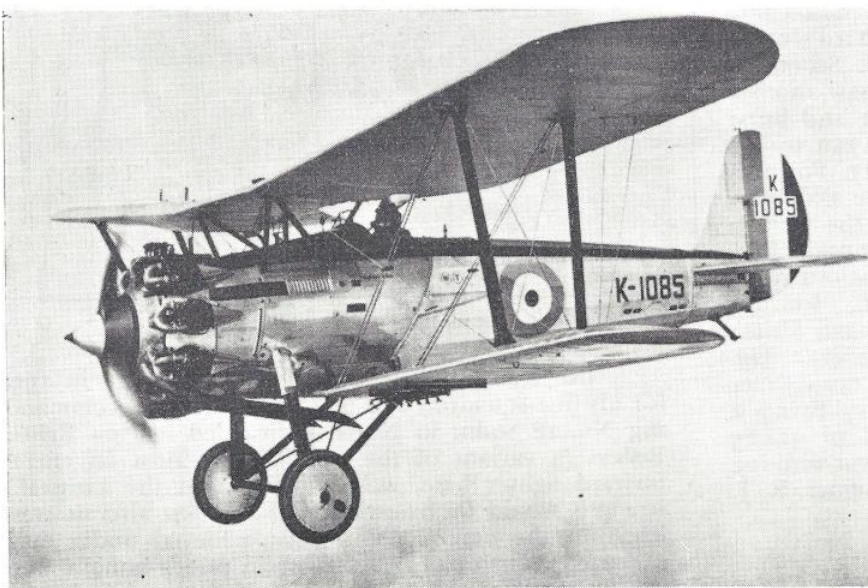


Wing Commander H. G. Malcolm, V.C.

Malcolm, from Dundee, who left the College in 1938 for his first squadron and by December, 1942, commanding No. 18 Sqdn. in North Africa, led his ten Bristol Bisleys (a variant of the Blenheim) against an enemy forward fighter base, well knowing that the Luftwaffe strength would be overwhelming—all ten aircraft were lost, but the bombing had been achieved under magnificent leadership. In this splendid pilot's honour were named the Malcolm Clubs which did so much for the forces at home and overseas. The posthumous Victoria Cross of Wg. Cdr. Malcolm, heads Cranwell's long list of Honours and Awards.

When John Dowland left the College to fly bombers he was one of few cadets who, at that time, had successfully baled out during his College training and he was intensely disappointed, when war came, to be sent to R.A.F. Manby, Lincs., to continue his specialist armament work as an instructor. On several occasions during 1940 he volunteered to try and remove unexploded bombs from ships at Immingham and Grimsby, with little or no knowledge of the German mechanisms, and he ordered all others away at the vital moments of defusing (though Leonard Harrison, a civilian—now Wing Commander (Retired)—disobeyed and stayed with Dowland.) For conspicuous courage on these vessels both Dowland and Harrison gained the George Cross, Dowland, tragically, losing his life when C.O. No. 69 Sqdn., Malta, after a brilliant tour of duties which many believe should have been rewarded by another decoration. His widowed mother has bequeathed John's George Cross to the College. (See Lincolnshire Life, May, 1968, for full story.)





This Page:

- 1: Vickers Vimy.
- 2: Bristol Bulldog.
- 3: Avro Tutors.

Opposite Page:

- 1: Hawker Hart.
- 2: DH. Tiger Moth.
- 3: North American Harvard.
- 4: Percival Prentice (This one will be flown at Cranwell by Flt. Lt. Bob Batt, now director of Aviation Traders (Engineering) Southend.)



## GROUP CAPTAIN DOUGLAS BADER

A third George Cross for the College was won by Wing Commander Laurence Sinclair, commanding No. 110 (B) Sqdn. at Wattisham, Suffolk, for bravely rescuing airmen when a bomber burst into flames, fully laden, on the airfield. Today Air Vice-Marshal Sir Laurence Sinclair, G.C., K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. & Bar, is the highest-decorated living Old Cranwellian (and a former Commandant.) Apart from these four great awards, there were 82 Distinguished Service Orders, 260 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and innumerable other decorations for technical and staff work, in the 1939-45 conflict. *More than 400 Old Cranwellians gave their lives* that we might have a tomorrow, and who will ever forget the courage of Group Captain Douglas Bader, C.B.E., D.S.O. & Bar, D.F.C. & Bar, who lost both legs after graduating in 1930, but returned to command 242 Sqdn. in the Battle of Britain, and a Wing of Spitfires until brought down. His resistance to captivity was just one example of the spirit of Old Cranwellians (many of whom managed to get back to fly again).

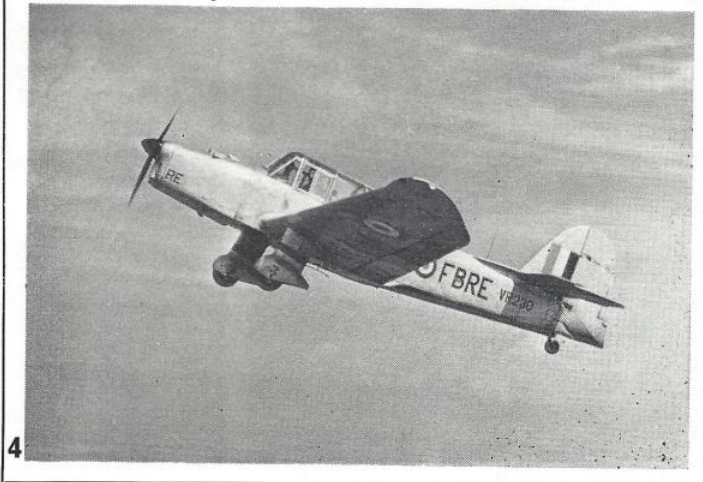
## ROSE TO TOP

Perhaps Lord Trenchard's happiest moment was when the first of the Old Cranwellians rose to the top to become Chief of the Air Staff. Today Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Dermot Boyle, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., K.B.E., A.F.C., a graduate of 1924, is Vice-Chairman of the British Aircraft Corporation and Chairman of Trustees for the R.A.F. Museum due to open at Hendon in 1971. Here will be links with the College in the shape of vintage aircraft flown from Cranwell, uniforms and decorations donated by Old Cranwellians or their relatives and many items which will draw graduates and their families and friends from all parts of the world. Sir Dermot's successor as Chief of Air Staff was another Old Cranwellian, M.R.A.F. Sir Thomas Pike.

## AUSTRALIA'S FIRST AIR V.C.

To return for a moment, though, to the College in wartime; the course commissioned in March, 1940, was followed mainly by members of the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve, though the May, 1940 entry included 26 of the cadets selected for the September, 1939 entry. They were accompanied by 16 Australians, first of many Commonwealth and Allied aircrew trained at Cranwell 1940-45. One such was the son of Australia's first Air V.C., the late A.V.-M. Frank McNamara, V.C., C.B., C.B.E., and today Wing Commander Robert McNamara (Ret'd.) lives in Buckinghamshire and, with his mother's approval, has offered his father's unique uniforms to the R.A.F. Museum—only one instance of the help given to the project by Old Cranwellians.

Enemy attacks started on Cranwell on 6th June, 1941, but cleverly constructed "decoy" airfields lured away much of the Luftwaffe effort and it was, in fact, an R.A.F. Whitley bomber which destroyed a dormitory, killing the crew (and one sleeping student) during fog. Satellite airfields were built at Fulbeck, Wellingore, Coleby Grange; the World War I field at Spitalgate, Grantham, was incorporated and many other units, including W.A.A.F. and an Officers Advanced Training School, came during the war. At one period the total strength was almost 7,000 men and women and Peace happily coincided with Cranwell's Silver Jubilee Year, King George VI revisiting the College and meeting some who had served there with him in his Royal Naval Air Service days.





## HENDON DISPLAY ACE

The first peacetime cadets came again on 14th October, 1946 for what was still a Flying Training School and it was April, 1947 when the first post-war Commandant the late Air Marshal Sir Richard Atcherley, K.B.E., C.B., A.F.C. & Bar, an Old Cranwellian and pre-war Hendon Display "Ace" returned to command his old College. Tremendous care has always been taken to select just the right men for the exacting posts of Commandant, Assistant Commandant, Chief Flying Instructor, and for the many other vital appointments connected with the College. The list of names would embrace the top ranks of the Royal Air Force, including A.V.-M. J. A. C. Aiken, wartime day and night-fighter pilot and a 1948 instructor; Air Commodore I. N. MacDougall, a 1938 graduate who returned as Chief Flying Instructor 1953-56 after commanding squadrons in the Middle East; Air Vice-Marshal E. D. McKinlay Nelson, 1932 graduate, Assistant Commandant from 1952 and Commandant 1962; Air Vice-Marshal M. D. Lyne, who entered Cranwell 1937 and became one of the Hurricane catapult pilots on the Russian Convoys, returning to Cranwell post-war; one of few men with the Air Force Cross and two Bars.

Air Vice-Marshal I. D. N. Lawson who became Commandant in 1965 flew 89 operational bomber sorties in World War II as a member of the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve, winning the D.F.C. & Bar and, post-war, com-

manding the R.A.F.'s V.I.P. Comet Squadron—"Two Sixteen"—and afterwards was C.O. of R.A.F., Lyneham, then "The London Airport of the Forces". Today's Lyneham C.O., Air Commodore G. C. Lamb, C.B.E., A.F.C., was Assistant Chief Flying Instructor when Cranwell re-opened in 1947 and in 1964 returned to be Assistant Commandant—a keen rugby player he refereed the France-Ireland international match in January, 1969.

Many have been the changes since the war, 1948 seeing the replacement of the trusty Tiger Moth by the Percival Prentice and in this year presentation of the Sovereign's Colour by King George VI—the first R.A.F. unit to receive one. Then came the de Havilland (Canada) Chipmunk, on which both Prince Philip and Prince Charles have trained, and the Boulton & Paul Balliol to replace the American-built Harvard. In 1954 came the first jets and the construction of runways on the South Airfield to take the Gloster Meteor and de Havilland Vampire, followed in 1959 by all-through jet training with the Hunting Percival Jet Provost. A fourth wing was added that year and on 1st June, 1962, the Bishop of Lincoln dedicated a new Anglican Church of St. Michael and All Angels in place of the long-used historic hangar church. On 27th May, 1960, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II graciously consented to become Commandant in Chief, visiting the College on 25th July, 1960, when The Sovereign's Colour was paraded for the last time before being laid up in the College and replaced by a new Colour presented by Her Majesty.

Group Captain Neil McKechnie, G.C.



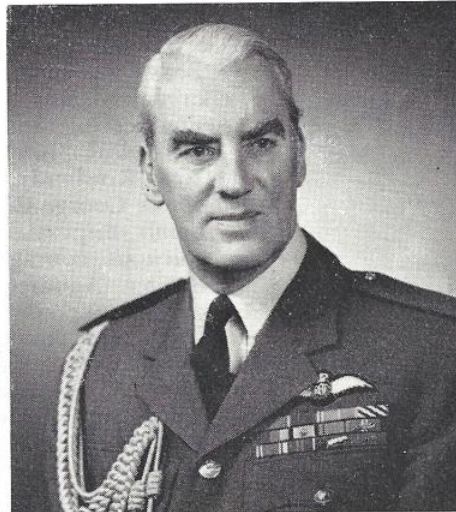
Wing Commander John Dowland, G.C.



Air Vice-Marshal Sir Laurence Sinclair, G.C., K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. and Bar.







Air Marshal John Rowlands, G.C., O.B.E.,  
B.Sc., C.Eng., F.R.Ae.S.

Marshal of the R.A.F., Sir Dermot Boyle,  
G.C.B., K.C.V.O., K.B.E., A.F.C.

Marshal of the R.A.F., Sir Thomas Pike,  
G.C.B., K.B.E., D.F.C. and Bar.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Donald Evans, K.B.E., C.B., D.F.C., senior serving Old Cranwellian, Reviewing Officer, 27th February, 1970. Behind (left) the Commandant, A.V.-M. T. N. Stack, C.V.O., C.B.E., A.F.C., a 1939 graduate and wartime flying boat pilot, post-war a distinguished transport aircraft commander. On the right Air Marshal Sir Leslie Mavor, A.O.C. in C., Training Command.

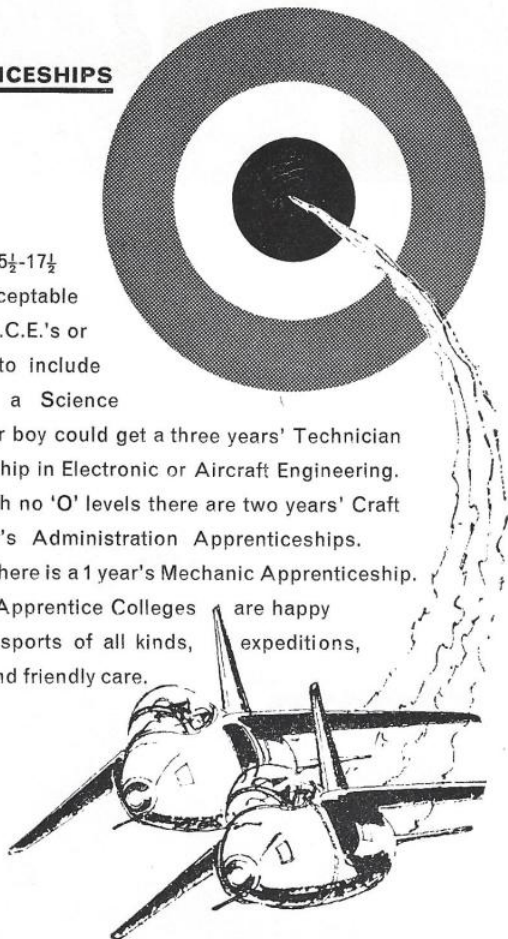




# The Royal Air Force YOUR CAREER OF THE 70's

## APPRENTICESHIPS

Age limits 15½-17½ with four acceptable 'O' levels, G.C.E.'s or equivalent, to include Maths and a Science subject, your boy could get a three years' Technician Apprenticeship in Electronic or Aircraft Engineering. For boys with no 'O' levels there are two years' Craft or one year's Administration Apprenticeships. In addition there is a 1 year's Mechanic Apprenticeship. The R.A.F. Apprentice Colleges are happy places with sports of all kinds, good food and friendly care.



## OFFICERS' CAREERS

If you are 17 there are opportunities for commissions in the G.D. (Flying), Engineering, Equipment, Secretarial and Regiment Branches provided you have, or expect to get five acceptable 'O' levels or equivalent, to include Maths and English Language. This type of commission guarantees service to the age of 38 with pension and gratuity benefits. For further details consult the R.A.F. Staff at —

**R.A.F. CAREERS INFORMATION OFFICE**  
19/20 SALTERGATE, LINCOLN. Phone 30601/2

On 3rd January, 1966, after much discussion and high-level planning, the R.A.F. Technical College, Henlow, Beds., was merged into Cranwell and the College then organized into Department of Cadets, Department of Engineering, and the R.A.F. College Unit. Heading the Technical "intake" was Air Commodore (now A.M.) J. S. Rowlands, G.C., O.B.E., B.Sc., C.Eng., F.R.Ae.S., whose George Cross was gained for two years of wartime bomb disposal duties when he displayed most conspicuous courage in circumstances of great personal danger. Another post-war example and inspiration to cadets was Wing Commander Derrick Nabarro, D.C.M. who, as a young N.C.O. pilot, made a brilliant solo escape from a German P.O.W. Camp and told his own story in the classic book "Wait for the Dawn". After completing his university studies he came to the College as one of the Education Officers.

Now, in this important year, a new Commandant arrives in the person of Belfast-born Air Vice-Marshal Desmond Hughes, C.B.E., D.S.O., D.F.C. & 2 Bars, A.F.C., M.A., who joined No. 264 Sqdn. from the Cambridge University Air Sqdn. in June, 1940, winning the first of his three D.F.C.'s flying the Defiant night-fighter. Later he flew the Beaufighter with Nos. 125 and 600 (City of London) Sqdns., before commanding 604 (County of Middlesex) Sqdn., which he took to Normandy in 1944. A.V.-M. Hughes has recently held several N.A.T.O. appointments and has been Air Officer Commanding Scotland and Northern Ireland and A.O.C. Northern Maritime Air Region of R.A.F. Strike Command. The College enters its second half-century as changes make it the postgraduate professional training centre for officers of all principal branches of the R.A.F. —not merely pilots and technical officers but to fill the increasingly complex demands and extending the equipment, secretarial, navigator, and R.A.F. Regiment courses introduced in recent years. School leavers wishing to make a full R.A.F. career are now being encouraged to obtain a university place and read for a degree before entering Cranwell for a year's professional and specialist training. While at university they will hold a commission as an Acting Pilot Officer and will be paid by the R.A.F. In this way Cranwell will relinquish its academic role, becoming instead a professional training centre, making full use of its incomparable facilities—entering the new half-century with enhanced importance.

The Royal Visit on 12th June with its ceremonial parade, flying display and parachute jumping display, exhibition of aircraft which have served the College over the years, garden party and guest nights, will see many graduates and instructors returning to Cranwell and to the Lincolnshire they grew to love. In this all-too-brief tribute we salute them all and wish Air Vice-Marshal Hughes, his staff and cadets every success as they tread the first rung of the extended ladder up whose earlier steps so many have climbed to the top.

*NEVER IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN  
CONFLICT WAS SO MUCH OWED  
BY SO MANY TO SO FEW . . .*

Winston Churchill, August 20th, 1940.