

AVIATOR EXTRAORDINAIRE

MY STORY

AIR COMMODORE
G J CHRISTOPHER PAUL CB DFC

A lifelong fascination and love of flying and aircrafts is fuel for this engaging autobiography by G J Christopher Paul, CB, DFC; a man bitten by the aviation bug at an air display at the age of four, and thereafter a devotee. His remarkable RAF career was followed by an eventful civilian career in aviation, which saw him organise rallies at places such as Sywell, encouraging 'flying for fun'. Both halves of his flying life are detailed here in chronological order and in his own words. Minor additions have been made to offer technical descriptions to readers unfamiliar with Paul's aviation vocabulary.

The fifty year span of his career covered an incredible period of aviation history; from gaining his license in the 1920s to his retirement in the 1970s, there was virtually no iconic or, for that matter, obscure aircraft that Christopher Paul did not fly. Included in the book is an extensive appendix in which Paul details, again in chronological order, every aircraft type he flew during his career. It is a veritable roll of honour of every conceivable aircraft, both British built and International, across arguably the most important period of aviation development.

Interwoven with his own career progression and experiences are world events and situations. Coupled with this we can clearly see the development of aircraft over a period of over fifty years. Eloquently written, this is the autobiography of a man who described flying a Spitfire as having 'one's own wings'; the thrill of flight is translated here, and the effect is equally thrilling. A lively account of a life in the skies.



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My Story

By
Air Commodore G J Christopher Paul, CB, DFC



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AVIATION

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FOREWORD

CHRISTOPHER PAUL 31 October 1907 – 11 January 2003

Christopher was not only a good friend, but I had always admired him for his enormous enthusiasm for aviation in general and for the Royal Air Force in particular. However it was not until I started asking around, and then read the remarkable book which he had written for his family entitled *My Story*, that I realised that here was someone who had spanned an incredible period of aviation history, the like of whom we shall probably never see again. I will try to pick out some of the highlights of this most extraordinary career.

His first recollection of flying was in 1911 at the age of four, when he was taken to an air display to see Pégoud, the Frenchman who was the first pilot to loop an aircraft in public. There were no less than three Admirals on the two sides of his family and he chanced to overhear the one who was uncle and godfather say: 'Of course the boy must go to Dartmouth'. Christopher subsequently wrote: 'Such being my perverse streak of obstinacy, this decided me that whatever else I did, it would never be Dartmouth!' Later he was not exactly encouraged at Cheltenham where most of the boys were going into the army because the RAF was considered 'not quite the career for gentlemen'.

It was, however, at Cambridge, reading mechanical sciences that he realised more than anything else that he wanted to fly. So he joined the recently formed University Air Squadron in 1927, going solo on the Bristol PTM (the Primary Training Machine) after five hours, gaining his wings after a mere thirty-six hours and, after his degree, a regular commission in the RAF in 1929. In the same year, at Spithead, he watched Flying Officer Waghorn of the Central Flying School win the Schneider Trophy for Great Britain for the second time.

After completing the course at No 1 FTS at Netheravon he joined his first squadron in 1930, No 13 Army Cooperation Squadron, equipped with Armstrong Whitworth Atlases. His disappointment on being told, after only six months on the squadron that he was posted to the Fleet Air Arm at Gosport was compensated by his final report from his squadron commander. Christopher wrote: 'He awarded me that coveted and rarely given pilot assessment of exceptional, a rating which I was proud to retain in every subsequent pilot report so long as they were made on me.' this was remarkable.

Fleet Air Arm postings were not popular; the only way out being to volunteer for the five year Japanese interpreter's course; he decided to stick with the Fleet Air

Arm whose pilots were roughly 50/50 RAF and RN. He flew from the carriers *Courageous*, *Furious* and *Glorious*, rather disrespectfully referred to by the RAF as Outrageous, Curious and Spurious. He flew most of the seaplanes and flying boats of the day and the list includes a number of aircraft I have never even heard of. Of the Fairey IIIF amphibian he reported 'water performance poor, deck performance frightening'.

Pre-war RAF officers were expected to specialise, and when, in 1932, the Air Ministry realised he had an engineering degree they sent him on the two year engineer officer's course at Henlow. He didn't enjoy being away from flying, but he did enjoy getting to know one of his fellow students, Frank Whittle. He also seemed to spend most of his spare time scrounging flying from friends in such wonderful aeroplanes as the Hawker Fury. During this period he joined the London Aero Club at Stag Lane and obtained his civil licence, No 1179, on a Cirrus Moth at 15/- an hour. After the engineering course he rejoined the Fleet Air Arm at Lee-on-the-Solent where he was responsible for the workshops which serviced all the Fleet Air Arm aircraft, and, as their test pilot, naturally he had to fly them all.

He was promoted Squadron Leader in 1938 to take command of 90 Squadron at Bicester, recently formed with Hawker Harts, but about to become only the second squadron to re-equip with Blenheims. Then during the RAF Staff College course at Andover, which he completed just before the Second World War started, he managed to fly a Spitfire which had just come into service at Duxford. Christopher wrote: 'it became, in a magic way, one's own wings'.

The day before war was declared he was sent to his war appointment, the Advanced Air Striking Force at Rheims. His job was to prepare for the arrival of the ten Fairy Battle Squadrons supporting the British Expeditionary Force. He was the camp commandant based in Madame Pommery's champagne factory. Poor fellow!

In December 1940 he took command, now as a Wing Commander, of 150 Squadron flying Wellingtons from Newton. He describes an incident in *My Story* which tells us much about Christopher. He was acting station Commander at the time when they were tasked to attack the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* at Brest. The bomb load specified by Group was such that the crews would be dangerously short of fuel on their return if the weather was bad. He argued to have the load reduced or to have a diversion specified in the south of England, but was met by incomprehension from the staff and was firmly told to 'obey orders or else'. In the event, one of his crews ran out of fuel and they were all killed. Christopher felt that he should have put up a much more determined fight, regardless of the consequences, for what he knew to be right.

In 1943, as the RAF member of the Directing Staff at the Army Staff College at Camberley one of the RAF students, Bob Braham, by then a famous night fighter pilot, sent Christopher solo on a Mosquito. After landing he thought the Mossie to be one of the most delightful aeroplanes he had ever flown. By now I'm sure you have come to realise that nothing could keep Christopher out of the air.

And now to what I presume was the most critical period of his life, his four

month tour in 1944 commanding 98 Squadron flying Mitchell medium bombers from Dunsfold. Their targets were the softening up of the German defences before the allied invasion of Europe. He flew thirty-nine missions, mostly leading his squadron with up to twenty-four aircraft. He was then awarded his DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) which had an unexpected beneficial effect. Until now his father had never overcome his disappointment at Christopher joining the not quite gentlemen's brigade, but as soon as he won his DFC he suddenly became a good chap! He had already been awarded the Czech Military Cross in 1939 and the Belgian *Crioux de Guerre avec Palme* the next year. Subsequently he was also mentioned in dispatches.

After the war the 98 Squadron Association was formed and he was elected an Honorary Life Member. Until shortly before he died, he used to send the secretary a cheque to cover the cost of the port for the members to be able to drink the Queen's health. He was also involved with the creation of the 90 Squadron Association, becoming its chairman and later its President and Patron.

The war is now over and it is the 11 March 1946, which he wrote was a very significant date in his life. It was while commanding 13 Operational Training Unit with Mosquitoes at Middleton St George (now Teeside Airport), that he used to fly, first thing in the morning, a Tiger Moth. To the entertainment of the airmen he used to land it on a small patch of grass in front of the hangar and, at the end of the landing run turn towards the hangar door, switching off the engine just before it free wheeled silently into the hangar. This required approaching very low over the roof of a hut. Unfortunately he hadn't noticed that, since his previous flight, a co-axial aerial had been erected only three feet above the roof, and this he collected with his undercarriage, the aerial acting as a very effective arrester cable. This brought the Tiger to a grinding halt, but about 20 feet up. He survived the resulting crash, but with two badly bruised eyes. In writing his own station commander's comments on the accident report he said: 'The pilot was showing off and is entirely to blame.' Unfortunately some years later, as a result of the crash, he lost the sight in his left eye.

Shortly afterwards he experienced his first flight in a jet aircraft, a Meteor at Molesworth, describing the flight as: 'a delight beyond description, so much so that I got completely lost!' It was also at Middleton St George that he became seriously involved with gliding by setting up the first RAF gliding club in England on his station. This interest continued with his next posting to the British Air Forces of Occupation at Buckeburg where, as Group Captain Air Training, he was responsible for all the many RAF gliding clubs in Germany, most of which were based on ex-Luftwaffe schools.

He had flown to Germany on this tour with his own Mk VI Mosquito and he used this aircraft on all his staff visits for the following two years. There had been a good bit of muttering about his refusal to allow anyone else to fly it, but shortly after his departure for a tour in the USA to attend the USAF War College course,

the chief mutterer decided to fly the aircraft, swung badly on take-off and finished up in a rubbish dump; who said aircraft don't have personalities?

On his return to England in 1949 he found himself in the Intelligence Department of the Air Ministry. During that tour he founded the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association. He felt strongly that it was important for other ranks to be able to enjoy flying in much the same way as Naval ratings can enjoy sailing dinghies with the Royal Navy's Sailing Association. Initially there was no enthusiasm from the RAF Sports Board for official backing – the Secretary saying to Christopher: 'You can't kick it, you can't throw it, you can't hit it, you can't shoot it – so it can't be a sport'! But he and some friends decided to go ahead anyway. The actual event is recorded on a plaque of the Founders Trophy which he presented in 1964. It is inscribed: 'The RAFGSA was founded on 15 December 1949, by H.G. Forbes, D.D. Martin, R.P. Hanks, T Page and G.J.C. Paul in a taxi on the way to a Chinese Restaurant. Also at the birth was a policeman, who tried to stop it on the grounds of overloading the cab and the driver who pressed on regardless.' Christopher became the first chairman and made the first flight in a RAFGSA Prefect glider from Detling in May 1950. He later became their Life Vice President.

After a year at the Imperial Defence College he achieved his life-long ambition in 1954 of becoming Commandant of the Central Flying School, as an Air Commodore, at Little Rissington. CFS is the oldest flying school in the world, its first Assistant Commandant in 1912 being one Major Hugh Trenchard who founded the RAF in 1918.

It was a time of great change, not least of which was the introduction of helicopters to CFS. He described his first helicopter solo in a Dragonfly thus: 'It was quite an experience, and I never thought it possible to recapture for a second time, the amazed mixture of delight, apprehension and triumph when one's instructor, as always, unexpectedly gets out and says: now do three circuits and landings yourself!'

He sums up his time at CFS thus: 'For Rosemary (his first wife), as well as for myself, it was, I think, the best two years of our life in the service.' For his work at CFS he was awarded his CB (Companion of the most honorable order of the Bath). Later he became President of the CFS Association.

After CFS he was posted to Aden as the Senior Air Staff Officer. It was 1956 and the time of the Suez Crisis. The consequent build up of British Forces in the area resulted in his one transport squadron of Valettas being hopelessly swamped with tasks. So he requisitioned Aden Airways and their Dakotas which, he said, did the work most efficiently. I wonder how many other RAF officers have requisitioned an airline?

After a year at Aden he was posted home to the Air Ministry as Director of Operational Training. But before taking up his appointment he attended a Meteor refresher course at the Flying College at Manby. He was so impressed with his instructor that he wrote: 'I think this was the moment when I first conceded that

the new generation of pilots were better than me. My instructor gave me a certain belief that the present pilots in the RAF are, as indeed they must always be, superior in every way to their predecessors. My much loved RAF is indeed in good hands.'

In 1958 he took early retirement at the age of fifty-one. The very next day he started work as the Secretary General of the Air League, an organisation pledged to improve the nation's air-mindedness. The job required him to visit many civilian airfields and so, to compensate himself for the loss of service flying, he bought a Turbulent for £650. The Turbulent is an ultra light aircraft weighing only 3cwt and is powered by a Volkswagen car engine. He even wangled a personalised registration – G-GJCP. As part of the job he was manager of the Air League's magazine, *Air Pictorial*, writing many articles himself reporting on some of the aircraft he flew. During his thirteen years as Secretary General his name had become synonymous with air education and he helped with the creation of the Air Education and Recreational Organisation (AERO) for which he was awarded the League's Scott Farnie Award of 1970.

He parted company with the Air League in 1971, but by then had become very involved with the light aircraft movement in general and in particular with home-built aircraft represented by the Popular Flying Association, of which he had become President three years earlier. The writing of the so called Presidential Flying Tests in the PFA magazine gave him the opportunity to fly yet more different aircraft types. He organised the first of the big PFA rallies at Sywell in conjunction with AERO of the Air League. He called it the F3 Rally – Flying For Fun. Ten years later he wrote a good book on the fifty year history of Sywell.

He was an active member of the Tiger Club and in 1963 he became the first secretary of the British Seaplane Club. He flew the initial test flight on the Sea Tiger, but before doing this he had to get a civil licence to fly seaplanes and also an instructor's endorsement, for which he tested himself and awarded himself, would you believe, an exceptional category.

After Rosemary died in 1975 he continued flying because he found it therapeutic. But in 1978 the doctor's caught up with him and failed to renew his civil licence. He said they condemned him as having an irregular heart beat, only one eye, and various bits missing including parts of his left arm, and being decrepit. He was seventy-one. He consoled himself by remembering that he had been an active pilot for over fifty years and by finding out that his civil licence was the oldest still current when it expired. He had flown the astonishing total of 276 different types of aircraft. Not a bad record.

So many people have told me of his professionalism, his charm, courtesy, helpfulness, sense of humour and above all, his friendship. One summed him up by simply saying 'he was a lovely fellow'. How right he was.

One of the many people who wrote to his wife Mollie ended his letter by saying: 'A great man has passed on, his presence will always be with us'. And so it shall.

Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Severne KCVO OBE AFC DL

INTRODUCTION

Air Commodore Gerald John Christopher Paul died at the age of ninety-five in January 2003. In his latter years he compiled and wrote *My Story*, which was a personal account of a remarkable RAF career, followed by an extremely unusual civilian career in aviation. The original manuscript was produced for his family and close friends. It comprehensively covered his military and civilian career.

We were approached by Pen and Sword, who had been contacted by Air Vice Marshal Sir John Severne, to edit and slightly reorganise the original autobiography. We were pleased to do so, but it was not until we began to read *My Story* that the full importance of this singular character and his involvement in some of the pivotal periods of RAF and aviation history became clear. It was indeed an extraordinary career.

Simple facts, like being an active pilot for over fifty years and discovering that his civil licence was the oldest still current when it expired only begin to explain the span of Christopher Paul's career. He flew a truly astonishing selection of aircraft since first gaining his pilot's licence in the 1920s. There is virtually no iconic or, for that matter, obscure aircraft that Christopher Paul did not fly in the next fifty years.

Such was the quality, vibrancy and obvious enthusiasm with which Christopher Paul explained his experiences on each of the 276 aircraft that it was unnecessary to change his words. Hence the vast majority of the words are his and rather than being a biography, this is truly an autobiography. At times we have taken slight liberties with sentence structure, or inserted explanations of technical terms, or historical events.

Christopher Paul was born on 31 October 1907 and educated first at Cheltenham College and then at St John's College, Cambridge. It was at Cambridge that he began his early association with the RAF, in the Reserve of Officers, learning to fly with the University Air Squadron in 1927. He was commissioned in the RAF in 1929, but in the following year found himself serving onboard HMS *Courageous*, the ill-fated aircraft carrier that was sunk by U-29 on 17 September 1939.

By then Christopher Paul had already rejoined the RAF, to serve with 90 Squadron on Blenheims. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was attached to the Advanced Air Striking Force HQ in France. After France fell he commanded a Wellington Bomber Squadron, was closely involved in training crews and then took over command of the B-25 Mitchell Bomber armed 98 Squadron. In the period

centred round the crucial Operation Overlord in June 1944 he led his squadron against innumerable targets, which would earn him the DFC, the Belgian *Croix de Guerre* and the Czechoslovak Military Cross. He was also mentioned in Despatches. He would fly some thirty-nine missions.

In the post-war period Christopher was posted as part of the occupation forces in Germany. This introduced him to a new flying passion that would continue for many years to come. He helped form the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association, where he learned to love powerless flight. He then spent time in the United States and then in the Air Ministry's Directorate of Intelligence.

In 1954 he achieved one of his lifetime ambitions when he became the Commandant of the Central Flying School. Two years later he was awarded the appointment of Commander of the Order of the Bath in the January 1956 New Year's Honours List. He was then sent to Aden as Senior Air Staff Officer. This was during the build up to the Suez Crisis and it is a measure of his adaptability that he effectively requisitioned an entire airline to operate as an impromptu transport unit.

Following his tour in Aden he returned to the Air Ministry and finally retired from the RAF in 1958. He was just fifty-one years old and had a whole new career in civilian life ahead of him. Whilst being involved in civilian flying and gliding, the Royal Aero Club, the Popular Flying Association and the Tiger Club his main duties were as Secretary General of the Air League. This was a post that he would hold from 1959 until 1971.

Even after this he still continued to be a frequent flyer, both as a pilot and then after he finally lost his civil licence, at the age of seventy-one in 1978. By that time his sundry ailments and age had caught up with him. But he remained a strong aviation advocate for the rest of his life.

For virtually all of Christopher Paul's RAF career he was married to Rosemary and had two sons and a daughter. Rosemary died in 1975, but twelve years later he married Mollie Samuels. It is obvious from *My Story* that Christopher was a loving and dedicated husband to both Rosemary and Mollie and very much a family man. In the original *My Story* there were many examples of occasions and reminiscences that would only have resonance with family and close friends. As a result these have been either edited out or have been reduced in scope and length. What remains, however, is a detailed account of his career, but more importantly, an opportunity to see, perhaps uniquely, an account of aviation in its broadest sense across an enormous span of time. Christopher Paul was fortunate in as much as he began flying on First World War vintage aircraft, yet decades later, now a highly experienced yet still supremely competent pilot, was flying in jets. What certainly comes across on every occasion where he recounts clambering into an aircraft is the sheer joy and enthusiasm he felt each time.

My Story is chronological in its approach. Interwoven with his own career progression and experiences are world events and situations. Coupled with this we can clearly see the development of aircraft over a period of more than fifty years.

Christopher Paul clearly identifies some of his favourite aircraft and is never frightened to identify the shortcomings of even some of the most famous and successful aircraft that have ever been produced.

My Story is also accompanied by three appendices that Christopher Paul compiled. The first is his record of RAF service, spanning from 25 June 1927 to his last posting as Director of Operational Training with the Air Ministry, a post that he held when he retired on 6 October 1958. Christopher Paul interestingly sets his final retirement date as July 1978, after which he has not made any additions to his career CV. This is, perhaps, largely due to the fact that this was the fateful year in which he lost his pilot's licence. The second appendix is a fascinating extract from the log book of Flying Officer I.M. Williams, who flew as the navigator and bomb aimer on all of the sorties with 98 Squadron against German targets in France from 20 May to 17 August 1944. The final appendix is another fascinating list, in chronological order, of every aircraft type that Christopher Paul flew throughout his flying career. In itself it is a roll of honour of every conceivable aircraft, not just British built, across arguably the most important period of aviation development. Hidden amongst the list are the truly iconic aircraft, such as the Fairey Swordfish, the Hurricane, Spitfire, Wellington, Maryland, Mosquito, Tempest and Gloster Meteor. Even for those with more of an interest in civilian aviation, all of the key aircraft across these notable decades have been flown and subsequently rated by Christopher Paul.

Christopher Paul was a pilot during a period of aviation history second to none. He had an absolutely extraordinary career. He had been just four years old in 1911 when he had been bitten by the aviation bug at an air display. Despite family pressure to join the Royal Navy it was always going to be the RAF.

The likes of Christopher Paul may never be seen again, hence, and quite rightly, the title suggested by friends and family of this adaptation of *My Story* is *Aviator Extraordinaire.*

Jon Sutherland and Diane Canwell

CHAPTER ONE
LEARNING TO FLY

At *Cambridge*, as an undergraduate of St John's, I realised that, more than anything else, I wanted to fly. This started when I read in *The Times* that the Royal Air Force was about to begin direct recruiting of pilots into the Reserve of Air Force Officers. This was in late 1926. Up until this point the Reserve had comprised only those who had first served as regulars. I applied, was accepted, and at the same time accepted for entry into the University Air Squadron, with effect from September 1927.

I learned to fly at Filton in the RAF Reserve School run by the Bristol Aeroplane Company. This was during the period June to August 1927, having been commissioned as an Acting Pilot Officer on Probation, Reserve of Air Force Officers, with effect from 20 June 1927.

Our course at Filton was the first of its kind, and we were all undergraduates from Oxford, Cambridge or London. There were ten of us and most of us lodged in the house of a small garage located exactly on the threshold of what is now the eastern end of Filton's huge runway. In those days Filton was, like all aerodromes, all grass. It was owned by Mr Nash, who welcomed us and introduced us to the only other lodger, an ex-Royal Flying Corps Sergeant pilot on reserve training.

For our first week the weather was foul and nobody flew. We met our instructors, all ex-RFC and veterans of the First World War. Mine was a smallish Scot, named Jock Campbell. Dour at first meeting, reserved and very Scots, he had reddish hair and could be very forthright with a splendid economy of words. He was a superb, patient and gifted instructor, who sent me solo after just over five hours dual with the parting words 'Remember your ambition ought to be to become, not a brave pilot – just an Old One'.

The other two instructors were Shaw, of whom I saw very little; and Cy Holmes, a happy extrovert who appointed himself social mentor to our gang from Cambridge and introduced us to all those delights of old Bristol.

The first aircraft we flew was the Bristol Preliminary Training Machine (PTM). It was strong, fully aerobatic, had no peculiarities that I can remember, and was powered by a three-cylinder 100hp Bristol Lucifer. Very early in our training we were taught spins, and recoveries, and on every subsequent flight, dual or solo, we practiced at least one good spin; and generally one each way. One point of this was that a spin initiated suddenly in the same direction as the rotation of the engine could stop it, in which case it had to be restarted by diving. But most important was to regard spinning as a normal, everyday manoeuvre.

After qualifying on the PTM we moved on to the Jupiter Fighter. This was a truly beautiful aeroplane. Its wings and empennage (tail section) were identical to the Bristol Fighter with a 275hp Rolls-Royce water-cooled engine. It had, however, a 450hp nine-cylinder Jupiter radial engine, a plywood fuselage and Frise ailerons, which conferred a degree of lateral control previously unknown. Its performance was as good or better than most contemporary RAF fighters; at that time the Grebe, the Fleet Air Arm Flycatcher, and Hawker Woodcock. In fairness to these, it must be added that the Jupiter Fighter carried no armament, and no drag producing fitments like external bomb racks. The smaller fighters could obviously out-manoeuvre it, but the Jupiter fighter performed all normal aerobatics well and, in our enterprising but inexperienced hands, some unusual ones as well.

I completed my course at Filton on 19 August 1927, having flown a total of twelve and a quarter hours dual, and twenty-four hours and five minutes solo.

A year later to the day, I received Air Ministry authority to wear RAF pilots' wings. It is interesting to note that the authority was signed by Cuthbert Dearlove, later to be my Commanding Officer at RAF Bicester; and the covering letter by Squadron Leader Leslie H. Slatter, captain of the victorious RAF Schneider Trophy Team of 1927.

After a carefree summer holiday, travelling mainly by motorcycle and staying with friends first at Mullion Cove and then Cadgwith, I returned to Nottingham, and then to Cambridge. By this time my motorcycle was a rare Packman and Poppé. It was an the P & P that I took every opportunity to visit the RAF Aerodrome at Duxford, where the Cambridge University Air Squadron (CUAS) flew. This enabled me to get a good deal more flying in at Duxford than my share, to the neglect of my degree studies, but to my own complete enjoyment and satisfaction. I was able to cut many lectures, having come to a suitable arrangement with the various lecture theatre attendants, whose duty it was to ensure that attendance sheets were signed.

The CUAS Chief Flying Instructor was Foxy French. He was tall, lean and quiet, but never seemed to be quite serious about anything, but underneath a genial exterior was a most acute mind which missed nothing. His assistants at Duxford were Nuttall, who for many years held the RAF high jump record; Edmund Hordern, one of Cranwell's (officer training school) first products; Rupert Nash; and part-timer Mouse Fielden. Fielden would later train Edward Prince of Wales and become the First Caption of the Queen's Flight. During the Second World War, Fielden, then a Group Captain was in command of RAF Station Tempsford and from here he controlled all flights to drop agents into, and to pick them up from enemy occupied territory, using Lysander aircraft. At Duxford, however, Fielden was a pilot in the meteorological flight, flying Hawker Woodcocks. The flight was commanded by Jeffrey Quill, who would go on to be Supermarine's Chief Test Pilot and was closely involved in the development of the Spitfire.

In 1927 I also became a member of the London Aeroplane Club, based at Stag Lane in Edgware, London. This gave me my first taste of Club flying and light

aircraft, in the form of the then relatively new de Havilland Cirrus Moth. I paid fifteen shillings an hour to fly at Stag Lane and, having been checked out by the Club's Instructor, Clem Pike, was able to fly there whenever I had the cash, and my P & P would take me there. Stag Lane was the headquarters of de Havilland. They also ran a Reserve School similar to the one at Filton. The primary trainer was the Avro 504 and their advanced trainer the DeH9J. It was here where I first obtained my Civil Licence (Number No 1179, dated 19 September 1927). Looking back, I had become a fully licensed civil pilot nearly a year before achieving my RAF Wings.

The high spot of the summer of 1928 was the CUAS camp at Old Sarum, near Salisbury in Wiltshire. The squadron was divided into three sections, each about twenty strong, and each spending three weeks under canvas. We became accustomed to the life of a busy RAF station, which, at that time, housed the School of Army Cooperation (aircraft used for reconnaissance, air photography and liaison). The school was commanded by Wing Commander McEwen a tall, gaunt Scot, who joined the RFC from a Highland Regiment and later became an Air Marshal. The Commandant of the CUAS was Wing Commander Vernon Brown, who had joined the RAF from the RNAS in 1918. The Adjutant, Victor Goddard (later Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard) had been an airship pilot.

I was promoted from AVRO 504s to the Bristol Fighter, the ancestor of the Jupiter Fighter which I had already flown the year before at Filton. Although lacking the power of the Jupiter it was a superb aeroplane. It was reasonably aerobatic, and comfortable with a good view all round. In those days it was considered bad form to use the engine during the approach to land – every landing was done as though it were a forced landing. On grass aerodromes without runways the universal rule was that the aircraft lowest in the circuit had right of way. Following aircraft landed on the right of the one ahead, came to a halt before turning, and then turned off to the left. This was for the prevailing left hand circuit. I cannot remember any aerodrome that used a right hand or variable circuit. There was, of course, neither radio nor air traffic control. But with good pilot discipline, quite a small grass aerodrome, like Old Sarum, could handle large numbers of aircraft simultaneously, and it was not uncommon to see a dozen or more 504s and Bristol Fighters together on circuits and landings. The engine off landing originated from RFC days, when engine failure was frequent.

Before being allowed loose on a Bristol Fighter, there was a requirement to make three landings, engine off and finishing within a chalk circle of 50 yards diameter marked in the centre of the aerodrome. Needing an engine to get in was known as 'Rumbling'. Anyone needing to rumble had to buy the beer that night. We used to start flying before breakfast, usually by about 6.00 am.

It was at Old Sarum that I first met Corporal Lever. He was one of the kindest of men, large, grizzled, tough; an old soldier who knew every fiddle and who had a heart of gold. My particular chums at that time were Bruce Cooper, Pat Fraser (later Air Marshal Sir Pat Fraser) and Harry Burke. Corporal Lever looked after the



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