

# A DICTIONARY OF THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Geoff Simpson

The year 2010 will see the 70th anniversary of The Battle of Britain, a significant anniversary at any time, but possibly to be the last one at which survivors of that historic battle will be able to join in the memorial celebrations. While many books detail the story of 'The Few', and describe the technical details of the aircraft and the aircrew who took part on both sides, here for the first time is a book that provides a useful background to every aspect of the conflict, comprising 150 entries covering everything from 'Ace' to 'Women's Auxiliary Air Force'.

Sample entry:

**Nicknames** – Nicknames for aircrew were often seen as a sign of being accepted and frequently stayed with the person concerned for life. There were plays on names – "Polly" Flinders, "Bunny" Carrant, "Sticky" Glew, "Robin" Hood. Some described a personal habit – "Social Type" Jeff was always immaculate. "Broody" Benson would, between sorties, sit slumped in a chair. "Tannoy" Reid was often to be heard on the radio. Some referred to physical appearance – "Woolly Bear" Ritchie was big, but also gentle; "Sawn-off" Lock was small; "Dopey" Davies was supposed to look like one of the Seven Dwarfs. Others were biographical – "Dimsie" Stones had been caught with the book by Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School. "Sailor" Malan and "Sinbad" Innes had both been to sea before joining the RAF. "Sheep" Gilroy had been a farmer and "Sticks" Gregory a professional drummer. For "Hawkeye" Wells the origins of his nickname lay with his achievements as a schoolboy shooting champion in New Zealand. He continued to demonstrate his talent while flying RAF fighters. "Grubby" Grice, "Widge" Gleed and "Fanny" Brinsdon were among those who claimed not to know the reasons for their sobriquets. For the slight Gleed the name appears to have been an abbreviation of "Wizard Midget".

Many entries are accompanied by contemporary photographs further enhancing the reader's enjoyment of this unique publication.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Geoff Simpson** is a Trustee of the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust, a Council Member of the Friends of the Imperial War Museum and a member of the RAF Historical Society and the Guild of Battlefield Guides. He has written many articles and a number of booklets on aspects of the history of the RAF in the Second World War.

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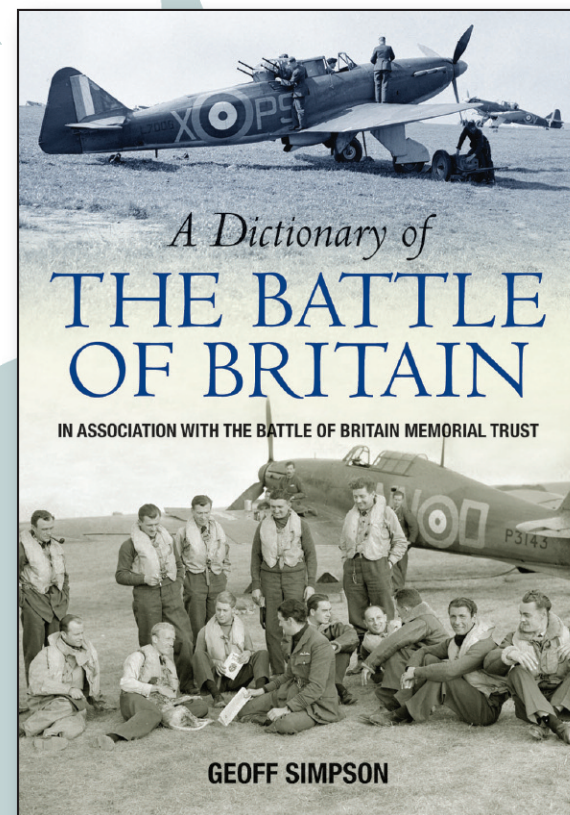
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Top left: *Pt Off L G H Kells about to fly a night sortie in a Blenheim of No 29 Squadron. Kells was lost in 1941, failing to return from a Hurricane test flight. (Courtesy of Imperial War Museum, London, negative no CH 1584)*

Above: *Aldwych underground station in use as a shelter on October 8. (Courtesy of Imperial War Museum, London, negative number HU 44272)*

Top right: *Fairey Swordfish on a training flight. (Courtesy of Imperial War Museum, London, negative no A 3532)*

*The Prime Minister and Mrs Churchill on their way to visit the London docks, September 25 1940. (Courtesy Imperial War Museum, London, negative no H 4367)*

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*This Director of the Blücherer failed to return from Adler Tag. Attacked by at least ten RAF fighters while bombing the airfield at Eastchurch, the aircraft crashed at Brattle Farm, Stalnearb, north east of Canterbury. The pilot, Lieutenant Vogel and the rest of the crew were taken prisoner. (Gen. Messenger PD14634)*



**Ace** – A term normally used in the RAF to denote a pilot who had achieved the destruction of five enemy aircraft in combat.

**Adlergriff (Eagle Attack)** – German expression for the attacks which, if all went according to plan, would cripple Fighter Command as a prelude to invasion.

**Adler Tag (Eagle Day)** – The day on which Adlergriff would be launched. Eventually this occurred on August 15, with the considerable deficiencies in German intelligence being a prime cause of its relative lack of success.

**Air Transport Auxiliary** – Organisation established in 1939 following a proposal by Gerard d’Erlanger, a director of the then British Airways – his original concept involved a pool of civilian pilots carrying out such duties as the ferrying of mail, medical and other light supplies and ambulance work. However, aircraft delivery soon became a major task. Many ATA pilots were men considered unsuitable for RAF and FAA flying, through age or other cause. They were inclined to refer to themselves as “Ancient and Tattered Airmen”.

A women’s section, led by Pauline Gower, was established in 1940. Women flew all types of aircraft except amphibians off water. They also acted as flight engineers on four-engined aircraft such as the Avro Lancaster.

ATA personnel delivered Fairey Battles to France in May 1940, aircraft to Fighter Command airfields during the Battle of Britain and flew into Europe again after D-Day.

Before its disbandment at the end of the war the ATA had delivered 309,011 aircraft and suffered 174 aircrew deaths.

According to Lord Beaverbrook, “Without the ATA the days and nights of the Battle of Britain would have been conducted under conditions quite different from the actual events... They were soldiers fighting in the struggle just as completely as if they had been engaged on the battlefield.”

**Airfield Defence** – The Army provided many of the troops to defend airfields against possible attempts by German parachute and glider-borne troops to capture them, although the RAF trade of Ground Gunner was created in 1940. Later the airfield defence role would normally be performed by the RAF Regiment, formed in 1942. Built defences at Battle of Britain airfields included both real and dummy pillboxes.

On August 18 at Kenley, Second Lieutenant Hague of the Scots Guards earned the MC and Lance Corporals Miller and Gale the MM. On the same day Private Joseph Lester of the

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*Example of a double-page spread.*



*Royal Engineers disembarking at Dover during the Dunkirk evacuation. One appears to have acquired either a souvenir or a makeshift weapon. (Courtesy Imperial War Museum, London, negative number H 1618)*