



LORD TRENCHARD 'FATHER of the RAF'



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Marshal of the Royal Air Force Hugh Montague Trenchard, 1st Viscount Trenchard "Father of the Royal Air Force"



RAF Cranwell



Marshal of the Royal Air Force Hugh Montague Trenchard, 1st Viscount Trenchard, is often called the "Father of the Royal Air Force". Trenchard disputed this and said the title belong more to General Sir David Henderson, although the latter might better be described the "Father of the Royal Flying Corp". It was Trenchard who commanded the RFC when it became the RAF and it was he who, post WWI, built the foundations of a modern and independent fighting force and secured its future.

FORWARD

This article is a combination of various sources to whom I am grateful and absolve from all blame. The leading sources were:

www.historylearningsite.co.uk, www.livingwarbirds.com, www.fleetairarmoa.org/fleet-air-arm-history-timeline

Some observations I have inserted appear *[thus]*.

Introduction: Hugh Trenchard was a commander of the Royal Flying Corps during World War One and, by the end of that war, the first head of the newly formed Royal Air Force. Trenchard took over command of the RFC when it was primarily acting as a spotter for the army's artillery combined with photo reconnaissance. For Trenchard this was not enough. He wanted the RFC to be far more aggressive in its outlook and to take on the German Air Service. The whole approach of Trenchard to aerial warfare effectively changed the corps from a relatively passive role to an aggressive one.

Hugh Trenchard was born on February 3rd 1873 in Taunton, Somerset. His father was an officer in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, while his mother's father had been a captain in the Royal Navy. With such a background it was not surprising that both parents wanted Trenchard to embark on a military career. Not overly gifted academically he failed the entrance exams for the Royal Navy but after several attempts passed the exams for a career in the army.

The Army Years: Trenchard became a second lieutenant in the Royal Scots Fusiliers. His first posting was to India in 1893. Here Trenchard made a name for himself as an expert shot (he won the All-India Rifle Championship in 1894) but he did not conform to the traditional way of life that many young fellow officers led then. Trenchard's sporting prowess saved his reputation amongst his fellow officers. In other respects he did not fit in; lacking social graces and choosing to converse little, he was nicknamed "the camel" as, like the beast, he neither drank nor spoke.

In 1900 Trenchard was posted to South Africa where the Second Boer War was being fought. Here he was ordered to form a mounted company of the Imperial Yeomanry. The Boers were skilled riders and had posed many problems for the British during the campaign. While in India, Trenchard had developed a reputation as a skilled polo player (in 1896 he clashed with a young Winston Churchill during a match) and it was for this reason that senior commanders believed he was the right man to create this new unit. During an action with the Boers in October 1900 Trenchard was seriously wounded in the chest.

Wounded: Trenchard found that he was suffering from partial paralysis below the waist. The doctors surmised that after passing through his lung, the bullet had damaged his spine. In December 1900 he returned to England. Later that month he moved to Switzerland to convalesce; it was believed that the fresh air would be good for his damaged left lung.

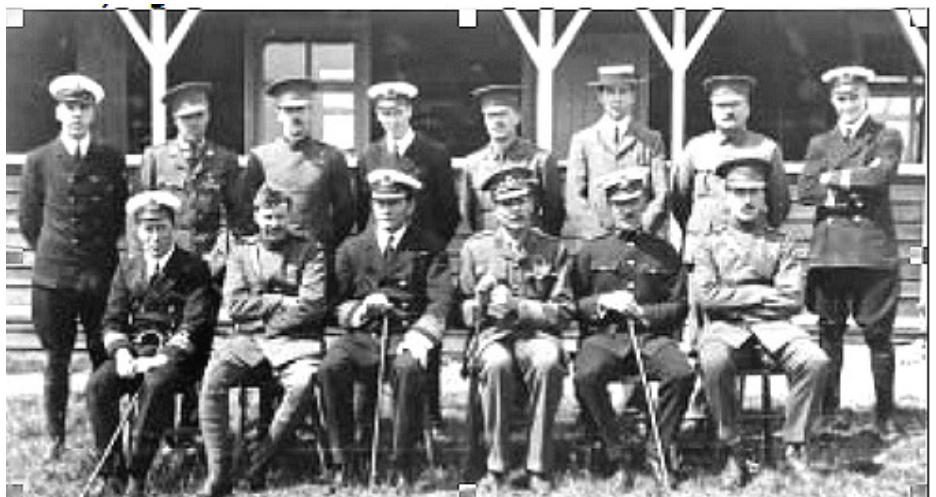
On Sunday 30 December Trenchard arrived in St Moritz to begin his Swiss convalescence. Boredom saw him take up bobsleighbing as it did not require much use of his legs. Initially he was prone to leave the run and end up in the snow, but after some days of practice he usually managed to stay on track.

It was during a heavy crash from the Cresta Run that his spine was somehow readjusted, enabling him to walk freely immediately after regaining consciousness. Around a week later Trenchard won the St. Moritz Tobogganing Club's Freshman and Novices' Cups for 1901; a remarkable triumph for a man who had been unable to walk unaided only a few days before.

Wanting to continue his army career Trenchard returned to South Africa in July 1901. Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief, tasked Trenchard with creating a new corps of mounted infantry. In early 1902, he was appointed commander of the 23rd Mounted Infantry Regiment and by August 1902 he held the rank of brevet major.

In December 1903 Trenchard was posted to Nigeria to quell inter-tribal violence. This he achieved and in 1906, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his work.

In October 1910, Trenchard was posted to Ireland. He found life within the officer's mess somewhat dull after his experiences in both South Africa and Nigeria. His boredom brought him into conflict with fellow officers and it was during his time in Ireland that Trenchard thought about moving to a number of colonial defence forces. However, it also coincided with the opening of the Central Flying School.



Central Flying School: A fellow officer who had served with Trenchard in Nigeria (Captain Eustace Loraine) contacted him and advised Trenchard to take up flying – something he did in July 1912. The day before Trenchard arrived for training Loraine was killed in a flying accident. (*Picture - The Central Flying School staff at Upavon in January 1913. Trenchard is in the front row, third from the right.*) After a short period of training (just over 60 minutes was spent in the air), Trenchard flew solo on July 31st 1912. He then moved to the Central Flying School. He was not a particularly gifted flyer and he spent more time on administrative work and training procedures.

In September 1912, Trenchard was involved in an army exercise whereby he acted as an air observer. It was during this exercise that he started to develop his ideas as to how aeroplanes could support men and weapons on the ground.

World War I: Trenchard made his name during World War One. When war was declared in August 1914 he was officially Officer Commanding the Military Wing of the Royal Flying Corps. By the time war ended Trenchard was head of the newly formed Royal Air Force.

As Officer Commanding the Military Wing one of Trenchard's tasks was the creation of new squadrons. He initially gave himself a target of 12 but Lord Kitchener increased this to 60. In October 1914 the command structure of the RFC was given a major overhaul. The post of Officer Commanding the Military Wing was dropped in November and Trenchard was given the command of the First Wing, which was made up of 2 and 3 Squadrons.

These provided the First Army, commanded by Haig, with reconnaissance photos and provided 'eyes in the skies' for the artillery. However, during the Battle of Nueve Chappelle (March 1915) the artillery decided to ignore the information given to them by the First Wing. In June 1915, Trenchard was promoted to colonel.

In summer 1915, General Sir David Henderson, head of the RFC, moved to the War Office. He recommended Trenchard for his position and Kitchener gave his approval. On August 25th 1915, Trenchard was appointed Officer Commanding the RFC in the Field with the rank of brigadier-general.

Trenchard determined that the RFC under his command was to be a far more aggressive unit than it had been under Henderson. Whereas the primary roles of the RFC under Henderson had been reconnaissance and artillery directing Trenchard now expected his pilots to take the fight to the enemy.

However, the Germans were equipped with technologically more advanced aeroplanes, especially the Fokkers, and losses within the RFC were high; the number of pilots killed outstripped those who replaced them. The pilots were fulfilling Trenchard's desire to be more aggressive but paid the price for it.

The RFC could not give the level of support that the British and French armies needed at the start of the Battle of the Somme because of the weather. Reconnaissance from the air was vital but in the days leading up to July 1st low cloud meant that the RFC could barely fly. If it had been able to do so it would have almost certainly spotted that German machine gun emplacements along with German barbed wire had not been destroyed by Allied artillery fire.

During the initial stages of the battle Haig had required the RFC to carry out low-level bombing of German positions. This had resulted in many aeroplanes being shot down. Trenchard appealed for more aeroplanes but with little success. What did a great deal to help the RFC was the winter weather from 1916 to 1917, which made flying very difficult.

The RFC recuperated during this time. However, the improved weather in March 1917 meant that flying resumed and between March and May 1917, the RFC lost 1,270 aeroplanes. What saved the RFC in the summer of 1917 was the introduction of new aeroplanes – the SE5, de Havilland 4 and Bristol Fighters – which were better able to take on the fighters of the German Air Service.

The German bombing of London was to have a major effect on the RFC. Summoned to London to meet David Lloyd George Trenchard was told to plan for revenge attacks against German cities – Lloyd George specifically named Mannheim. While senior Army figures had argued that the RFC was there to support troops on the ground Trenchard, pushed by the Prime Minister, had to focus on bombing and attacking the German rear.



On October 17th 1917, the RFC carried out its first bombing attack on German civilian targets when the Burbach iron foundry and railway lines were attacked by DH4's. On October 24th, the RFC flew its first long-range night-time bombing mission. Both of

Airco DH.4 Light Bomber used in raids over Germany.

these raids gave the government what they required – huge propaganda material. However, Trenchard was not keen on what it was doing to the RFC – splitting its forces and pursuing what he believed were non-

required campaigns. He wanted to concentrate on supporting the Army on the ground

Chief of the Air Staff: In December 1917 Trenchard was appointed Chief of the Air Staff in the newly created Air Ministry headed by Lord Rothermere, a leading newspaper proprietor. Major-General John Salmond succeeded Trenchard as head of the RFC. Trenchard had a difficult relationship with Rothermere whom he believed was too concerned with political intrigue as opposed to concentrating his efforts on what was happening on the Western Front.

This culminated in Trenchard offering his resignation on March 19th 1918 after Rothermere informed the RNAS that they were to receive 4,000 new aeroplanes that did not exist. Trenchard's resignation was accepted on April 10th. He was summoned to Buckingham Palace to explain his decision to the King.

Trenchard explained that he found it impossible to work with Rothermere and questioned his competence to be Air Minister. This got back to Lloyd George who interpreted this as an experienced Army officer questioning the basic competence of a newspaper magnate who now headed a new government ministry. On April 25th, Rothermere resigned.

The Independent Air Force: On June 15th 1918, Trenchard was appointed General Officer Commanding, later the Royal Air Force. The IAF carried out intensive bombing raids on German airfields, railways and centres of industry. Trenchard was also keen to teach the Americans about the new techniques of flying in combat.

He also developed a close relationship with the French Air Force and as the war drew to a close, this association was recognised when Trenchard was appointed commander of the Inter-Allied Independent Air Force in October 1918.

In the immediate aftermath of the war Trenchard found himself in a state of flux. No-one was quite sure if the Royal Air Force was going to be continued and Trenchard's first task after the war was to quell 5,000 mutineers at Southampton in January 1919. This he did without bloodshed – something that impressed Winston Churchill who was Secretary of State for Air. He persuaded Trenchard to take up the post of Chief of Air Staff on March 31st 1919.

The Royal Air Force: As head of the RAF Trenchard went about his work with a passionate zeal. He angered the Army Council by creating new officer ranks in the RAF. To emphasise the split between the Army and RAF, Trenchard became Air Vice Marshal and then Air Marshal. *[I have read that in their attempts to strangle the new service following WW1 both the Army and the Navy 'refused' to allow the RAF to use their rank titles. Editor]*

Under Trenchard the RAF was built on three pillars:

- The great training institutions of Cranwell, Halton and the Staff College at Andover. Cranwell was the RAF's officer training college; Halton was the technical training centre for groundcrew; Andover trained the RAF's middle ranking officers for higher command.
- The establishment of a reserve through Short Service Commissions and the creation of the University Air Squadrons in 1925 in for Oxford, Cambridge and London universities.
- The focus on technical knowledge and understanding



Barracks at RAF Cranwell

RAF Cranwell: Cranwell was first occupied by the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). The formation of the RNAS on 1st July 1914 meant that facilities at Upavon became inadequate, forcing the Admiralty to relocate its pilot and engineering training. Cranwell was chosen due to its close proximity to existing air stations on the east coast of England. Also, being in the middle of nowhere, it was far away from possible extra curricular distractions.

The Piloteer (the RNAS Station magazine) recorded the birth of Cranwell and noted that one officer: "had a days journey from London in the pouring rain in a decrepit lorry with one CPO and 13 men and their baggage. All were wet to the skin, and were not in a mood to see humour in anything, least of all in the barn... which was filled with corn and inhabited by rats..."

Prior to the building of College Hall (completed 1933) the College had been housed in adapted WWI huts, where "many pleasant and useful traditions, associated with a democratic and independent spirit, were forged." As Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) in 1918, one of Lord Trenchard's visions for the new Service was to build a college for officers along the same lines as Dartmouth and Sandhurst, thereby providing tangible evidence that the Royal Air Force was to be a permanent feature of Britain's military landscape.

This isolation of Cranwell appealed to Trenchard when looking where to site the new RAF College. Trenchard told his biographer: "Marooned in the wilderness, cut off from pastimes they could not organise for themselves, the cadets would find life cheaper, healthier and more wholesome".

[This suggests plenty of outdoor games and activities (including 'square bashing'), and cold showers. Surprisingly, cadets studied for two years before taking to the air. I have been unable to find a curriculum for these early days but assume there must have been a fair amount of military history, leadership, aviation theory, strategy and tactics taught.]



ROYAL AIR FORCE, CRANWELL.
1st. ENTRY 1920-1923. (No 1 Wing)

During WWII The 150ft tower of College Hall (page

1) was camouflaged, as were the runways along with other RAF runways in the UK. The German High Command knew that RAF Cranwell existed, as shown by a Luftwaffe reconnaissance photograph of RAF Cranwell taken in 1941. However, College Hall itself was not attacked due to Hermann Goering wanting the College as his HQ when they won.

RAF Halton: Lord Trenchard realised that his new Royal Air Force would need highly skilled airmen to provide the Service with a solid foundation. The RAF Apprentice Scheme ran, in its original form, from 1920 to 1993 - though the

delivery of world renowned training continues to this day. Boys as young as 15 left their schools and homes to join the most elite boarding school in Britain, RAF Halton; a school which would ensure their standard education was completed, their love of aeronautics nurtured, their outside interests in sports or music encouraged, and excellence in their careers assured.



From fitters to plotters, electrical mechanics to instrument makers, beginning with airframes and moving through to jet engines, communications and radar; the breadth and depth of knowledge and expertise which was taught, learnt and passed on to each fresh-faced entry was as revolutionary in its time as it is relevant today.

Royal Air Force Apprentices were a breed apart, a cut above, a group of boys who went on to be highly skilled craftsmen and airmen. Between 1920 and 1993:

- over 40,000 boys were trained
- over 10,000 were commissioned
- 90 attained senior Air Rank
- 116 fought as pilots in the Battle of Britain
- 2,000 gave their lives in WWII
- over 1,200 were decorated, including 1 VC and 5 GC's
- over 2,500 were Mentioned in Dispatches
- over 1,000 were awarded State Honours
- 19 were awarded Knighthoods

[MKAS has its very own 'Trenchard Brat' in the form of Cliff Wilkin (who was a Boy Entrant in a different scheme) who has entertained us several times with his tales of what happens behind the scenes in the RAF.]

Naval Aviation: By 31 March 1918 the RNAS had on charge 2,949 aircraft and 66 airships, with 55,000 officers and men manning 126 naval air stations: it was a meteoric rise in capability sprung from the hopes of the small band of volunteer pioneers that had begun naval aviation less than four years earlier. The next day control of the entire strength was handed over to the newly formed Royal Air Force, created by the merger of the RNAS and the RFC.

During the early 1920s the continued independent existence of the RAF and its control of naval aviation were subject to a series of Government reviews; all found in favour of the RAF despite lobbying from the Admiralty and opposition in Parliament. On each occasion Trenchard and his staff officers worked to show that the RAF provided good value for money and was required for the long-term strategic security of the United Kingdom.

January 1924 saw the first mention of the term 'Fleet Air Arm' of the RAF. On 24 May 1939, with war only three months away, full control of the training, organisation and equipping of the Fleet Air Arm, which had been in RAF hands since 1918, was restored to the Admiralty and the Fleet Air Arm was renamed the Air Branch of the Royal Navy. The RAF name of the Fleet Air Arm remained in informal usage and was later adopted officially. The transfer had been recommended by Sir Thomas Inskip in July 1937. The RAF immediately demanded the return of all aircrew.

The 1920's: Although Trenchard had attained a measure of financial security the future of the RAF was far from assured. Trenchard sought to secure the future of the RAF by finding a war-fighting role for the new Service. In 1920 he successfully argued that the RAF should take the lead during the operation to restore peace in Somaliland.

The success of this small air action then allowed Trenchard to put the case for the RAF's policing of the British Empire and in 1922 the RAF was given control of all British Forces in Iraq. The RAF also carried out imperial air policing over India's North-West Frontier Province.

The use of the RAF to attack and contain 'dissidents' was hugely more efficient and effective when compared with the use of the Army. The latter were relatively slow moving and required a large logistics train. Fighting 'guerrillas' on their home ground (what we now call 'asymmetric warfare') tended to lead to long, bloody and costly campaigns.

In the 1920's the RAF was used throughout the British Empire in a 'policing' role and it was expected that officers in the RAF would do a five-year stint abroad at some time in their career.



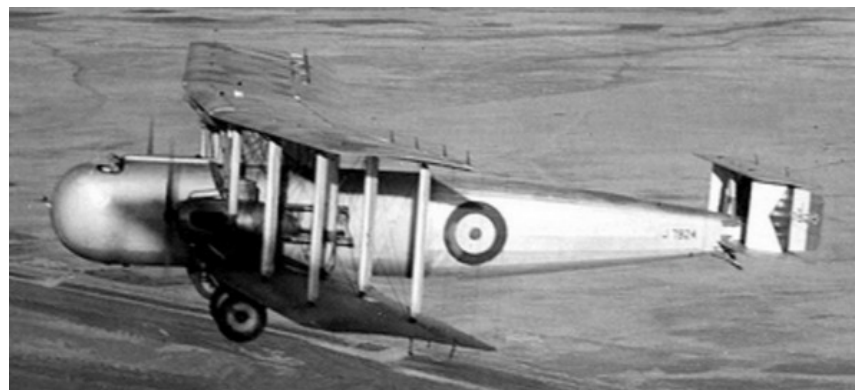
Trenchard was engaged in what must have seemed a never-ending battle with the Treasury for funding. Between 1927 and 1929 he used funding for the RAF to establish a High Speed Flight of pilots to help win the Schneider Trophy, which included the purchase of two Supermarine S6 aircraft that won the race in 1929.

Left: RAF HSF Team – Schneider Trophy 1929

Marshall of the RAF: On 1 January 1927, Trenchard was promoted from air chief marshal to marshal of the Royal Air Force, becoming the first person to hold the RAF's highest rank. The following year Trenchard began to feel that he had achieved all he could as Chief of the Air Staff and that he

should give way to a younger man. He offered his resignation to the Cabinet in late 1928, although it was not initially accepted.

Around the same time as Trenchard was considering his future, the British Legation and some European diplomatic staff based in Kabul were cut off from the outside world as a result of the civil war in Afghanistan. After word had reached London, the Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain sent for Trenchard who informed Chamberlain that the RAF would be able to rescue the stranded civilians. The Kabul Airlift began on Christmas Eve and took nine weeks to rescue around 600 people. The Vickers Vernon (right, a transport version of the Vimy bomber) played a major role.



When Trenchard handed over the position of CAS to Air Chief Marshal Sir John Salmond January 1st 1930 the main battles for the new Service had been won.

Trenchard was to become known as "The Father of the Royal Air Force". Trenchard's special quality was that he could take an idea and put that idea into practice, often beyond the expectations of those who served under him. Above all, he gave the RAF pride and status. After his resignation, Trenchard was created Baron of Wolfeton.

Commissioner of the Met: After retiring from the RAF Trenchard worked for the Goodyear Tyre Company. In 1931, he was offered the post of Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Trenchard initially declined the offer but when offered it for the second time, he accepted.

Trenchard established the police training college at Hendon in 1934, perhaps his best known achievement during his time as Commissioner. Not long after his appointment Trenchard had decided that the recruitment and training methods of Metropolitan Police were not conducive to developing senior leaders from within the Force. He believed in the development of an 'officer corps' as in the armed forces rather than relying entirely on promotion from the ranks.



He therefore envisaged a Metropolitan Police college that could help to produce such leaders by training the best selected from the ranks, as well as directly recruited educated men from school and university. Trenchard also wanted to create a new police rank of Junior Inspector to which Hendon's graduates would be promoted before later going on to the rank of Inspector.

Although Trenchard's plans were criticized as a militarizing step the Hendon College was opened in 1934. Today the College principally provides initial training to police recruits as opposed to only those selected for advancement to the higher ranks. An approximation to Trenchard's officer corps approach can be seen in the 'fast tracking' of graduates through early promotion *[though I believe they must first do two years in 'the ranks'.]*

Aftermath: Trenchard left the Metropolitan Police in November 1935 and in 1936 became Viscount Trenchard.

In the lead up to World War Two, Trenchard offered his services to the government on two occasions but they were not accepted. In particular Trenchard was dismayed by the seemingly passive approach of the government towards air defence. He was offered a number of posts in the early years of the war but he declined them all.

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Hugh Trenchard died on February 10th 1956 aged 83. Following his funeral at Westminster Abbey his ashes were buried in the Battle of Britain Chapel he helped to create.

Trenchard demonstrated a sound understanding of organisation, politics and strategy combined with the ability to make things happen. This is particularly illustrated in his laying the foundations for training at all levels in the RAF which served it so well in WWII. This despite the years of neglect in the 1930's after he left the RAF.

His obituary in The Times considered that Trenchard's greatest gift to the RAF was the belief that mastery of the air must be gained and retained through offensive action. During his life Trenchard strongly argued that the bomber was the key weapon of an air force; he is recognized today as one of the early advocates of strategic bombing and one of the architects of the British policy on imperial policing through air control.

[The two greatest men in the RAF were each named 'Hugh' and each was given a derisive nickname by their fellow officers because they were 'different'. They were Trenchard - 'The camel', and 'Stuffy' Dowding].

Andy Cornwell – Editor, 30 Oct 2016