### New Perspectives in Military Aviation Research

### Thursday 4-Friday 5 September 2025

Hosted at the Royal Air Force Museum, London, this two-day conference will explore new and exciting updates in Air Power research. This interdisciplinary conference will host scholars working on topics that relate to air forces, their personnel and technologies, the economies and societies with which they interact, the conflicts in which they have engaged, and the global and international context with which they are connected.

The research presented will provide new evidence and insights on the development of air forces, speaking to change or lack-thereof. In doing so, this research offers to contribute to and bolster the emerging scholarship on Air Power.

The panels hosted in this year’s programme will include the latest research on a range of topics including:

* Doctrine and procurement.
* Bomber Command.
* The public perception of Air Forces.
* The multinational impact of Air Forces.
* Memory of Air Forces.
* The environmental impact of Air Power.
* The future of Air Power.

This year’s keynote will be delivered by Dr Sam Alberti and Prof Holger Nehring, who will be giving a talk entitled ‘Material Memories of the Cold War.’

The cost of attending the conference in-person for both days is £60. This cost covers registration, refreshments and lunch for both days. The RAF Museum is making up to a third of the conference tickets available at a concession price of £40. These tickets are intended for students, retired delegates, and those who define themselves as being on a clearly limited budget.

Please click [here](https://royalairforcemuseum.digitickets.co.uk/event-tickets/58700?branches.branchID=2042&_gl=1*9id0gm*_gcl_au*MTU1MzIzNzE3Mi4xNzE4MDk0MzEw*_ga*MTcyNzUwMTMxOC4xNzEyNjY2NjY4*_ga_DKDR0PJWFF*MTcyMjMyOTEyNC40MS4xLjE3MjIzMzM3ODIuNjAuMC4w&_ga=2.176907430.2023352288.1722238529-1727501318.1712666668) to book your place now.

The RAF Museum will be live-streaming the conference with access provided via the Museum’s [Crowdcast channel](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/qq3ytcmlaubc).

Royal Air Force Museum Conference 2025

Times are Given in British Summer Time (GMT+1)

Thursday 4 September

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| ***Day 1*** |  |
| 9:00 AM | Registration (Teas and Coffees) |
| 9:20 AM | Welcome |
| 9:30 AM | [**Panel 1 – New Thinking in Doctrine and Procurement (Chair: Dr Sebastian Ritchie)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/vvnHn)  Paul Stoddart | Reconsidering Doctrine and Procurement.  John Alexander | Slessor’s *Air Power and Armies* as Air Power History in Theory and Practice.  Matthew Powell | Forging the Future: The Air Ministry and the Advent of All-Metal Aircraft. |
| 11:00 AM | Break (Teas, Coffees, and Pastries) |
| 11:20 AM | [**Panel 2 – Re-Thinking Bomber Command (Chair: Dr Matthew Powell)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/tCWfx)  Thomas Withington | Heat Seekers: Operation Firebash and the RAF’s use of Napalm against the Luftwaffe.  Goran Hutinec | The Dos and Don’ts of Bombing a Concentration Camp.  Patrick Major | Arthur Harris’s Publicity War: Bomber Command and the BBC, 1942-1945.  William Hudson | The Archaeology of Bomber Command Airfields: A Multi-Phase Phenomenological Perspective.  Ewen Cameron | What the Other Squadron Did: 57 Squadron under the Shadow of 617 Squadron |
| 1:15 PM | Lunch |
| 2:00 PM | [**Panel 3 – Public Perceptions, Image and their Impact (Chair: Dr Sophy Antrobus)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/XBDeM)  Sophy Higgins | From Margins to Memory: Viscountess Katherine Trenchard and the Gendered Construction of her Husband’s Legacy.  Caroline Devonport | Tailored for the Skies: The Evolution of Women’s Flight Gear in the Royal Navy.  Russell Shanks | “It’s just a game”: Understanding Representations of British Second World War Air Power and Special Operations in Digital Wargames. |
| 3:30 PM | Break (Teas and Coffees) |
| 3:50 PM | [**Panel 4 – The Multinational Context of an Air Force (Chair: Stuart Hadaway)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/zzvvz)  William Gillispie | Before Tuskegee: African Americans in Flight and Combat in the First World War.  Steve Paget | The Global Air Force: The Royal Air Force’s History in its Multinational Context.  Russell Smith | The Price of a Wartime Squadron: Behind the Caribbean Titled Squadrons.  Emily Walton | Burning Blue: RAF Culture and Nationality Explored through ‘High Flight.’ |
| 5:30 PM | Wine Reception followed by a post-day one discussion at The Beaufort |

Friday 5 September

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| ***Day 2*** |  |
| 9:00 AM | Late Registration (Teas and Coffees) |
| 9:20 AM | Welcome |
| 9:30 AM | [**Panel 5 – Myth-Making and Memory (Chair: Dr Steve Paget)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/CvTdj)  Damien Accoulon | Airmen and the Myth of the “Knight of the Air” in Germany and France (1914-1939).  Jonathan Addison | Insights from Machine Learning on the Survival of top Luftwaffe Aces in the Second World War.  Mark Russell | The RAF’s Management of its Image since 1945: Why no Battle of Britain Square?  Ewan Burnet | Never let the Truth get in the Way of a Good Story: How Oral History Can Contribute to our Understanding of Air Power History. |
| 11:00 AM | Break (Teas, Coffees, and Pastries) |
| 11:20 AM | [**Panel 6 – The Environmental Impact of Air Power (Chair: Dr Peter Elliot)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/wyFyR)  Witali Gerber | Air Power through Manpower: The Institutionalisation of Child Conscription in the Luftwaffe’s Flakhelfer Program.  Alastair Noble | Winning Hearts and Minds? New Perspectives of the RAF in the British Zone of Germany, 1945-1950.  Stuart Hadaway and Dean Gibson | RAF Investigation into Legacy Munitions at RAF Fauld.  Gary Willis | The Dambusters’ Raid: Technical Ingenuity, Dashing Heroism and Environmental Warfare. |
| 1:00 PM | Lunch |
| 2:00 PM | RAFM 2024 Academic Award Presentation |
| 2:10 PM | **Keynote** [**–Dr Sam Alberti and Professor Holger Nehring | Material Memories of the Cold War. (Chair: Sebastian Cox OBE)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/VKPcE) |
| 3:10 PM | Break (Teas and Coffees) |
| 3:30 PM | [**Panel 7 – Looking to the Future of Air Power (Chair: Dr Richard D. Newton)**](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2025/AUufy)  Ian Thompson | Optimising Air Transport Survivability – or not.  Andrew Renwick | Offence or Defence?  Samuel Oyewole | African Perspectives on Air Power in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Automation of Warfare. |
| 5:00 PM | Closing Remarks |
| 5:10 PM | Finish |

**Conference Registration and Details**

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The RAF Museum is making a third of the conference tickets available at a concession price of £40. These tickets are intended for students, retired delegates, and those who define themselves as being on a clearly limited budget.

To book your ticket click [here](https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/whats-going-on/raf-museum-conference-2025/).

If this is your first time attending an academic conference, you are warmly encouraged to email the RAF Museum’s Historian and Academic Access Manager (details below).

The nearest stations to the RAF Museum are Colindale Underground (Edgware Branch of the Northern Line) and Mill Hill Broadway (on the Luton/King’s Cross/Thameslink line). The stations are, respectively, a 10- and 20-minute walk from the Museum. The 303 bus stops outside the Museum, there are bus stops for the 303 at both Colindale and Mill Hill Broadway. For full details of how to reach the Museum visit: <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/plan-your-day/map-and-directions/>

There will be a wine reception from 5.30pm on 4 September; the price of this is included in the in-person ticket. Delegates are welcome to join the organisers at The Beaufort pub (2 Heritage Avenue) on the evening of 4 September. The venue has disabled access and facilities but is at least 500 metres from the Museum and you may need to arrange for transport from the Museum.

**Access:**

The Museum is committed to providing equal access to its Research Events. All the buildings and rooms used for the conference are wheelchair accessible. However, only a limited number of wheelchair accessible seats are available in the Lecture Theatre. If you wish to reserve a space, you are warmly invited to contact the RAF Museum’s Historian and Academic Access Manager (details below). Please also contact us if there are additional arrangements that we can make for you.

**Online:**

The RAF Museum will be live-streaming the conference. Access to the live-stream will be free via the Museum’s [Crowdcast channel](https://www.crowdcast.io/c/qq3ytcmlaubc). For the best, experience, however, the Museum recommends attending in-person.

**Contact Us:**

If you have broader questions, please contact the Museum’s Historian and Academic Access Manager, Dr Megan Kelleher; she is part of the Archives, Library, and Research Department (Email [ResearchNews@rafmuseum.org](mailto:ResearchNews@rafmuseum.org)).

**Keynote Speaker:** Dr Samuel Alberti and Professor Holger Nehring

**Biography**

**Dr Samuel J.M.M. Alberti** is Director of Collections at National Museums Scotland, and an Honorary Professor in Heritage Studies at the University of Stirling. After training in history of science and teaching museology he worked at the intersection of museums and universities, first at the Manchester Museum, then as Director of Museums and Archives at the Royal College of Surgeons of England (including the Hunterian Museum). With Holger Nehring he led the AHRC-funded research project, ‘Materialising the Cold War’.

**Prof Holger Nehring** is Professor of Contemporary European History at the University of Stirling. He has published widely on the history of social movements in a transnational and global context as well as on the conceptual history of the Cold War. Together with Sam Alberti as PI, he is the Co-I for the AHRC-funded project 'Materialising the Cold War'.

**Title:** Material Memories of the Cold War

**Abstract**

Air Power has been key to the memory and heritage of the Cold War: bombers, planes and missiles as well as airfields have featured prominently in Cold War heritage and have provided material markers for its memory. But the specifics of these material memories have often not been clear – technological objects have operated as placeholders for broader historical interpretations.

Drawing on the findings of our AHRC-funded research project on ‘Materialising the Cold War’ we propose a different way of addressing the material memories of the Cold War: we focus on the experiences and memories that attach to artefacts in museums. This allows for a more specific discussion of historical memories – one that is attuned to different layers of experiences, and one that takes account of the materiality of memory objects themselves. This enables us to come to a more complex understanding of the relationship between change and continuity as well as past and present. And it enables us to see material memories as shaping experiences in the present.

This matters especially for the role of the Royal Air Force in the Cold War: while RAF Museums and other locations showcase the technology of the Cold War, it is important to think about how these technological objects link to the experience of the Cold War for those who operated them and to the experiences of those who now visit them. Focusing on the Vulcan in particular, our lecture will present some case studies that highlight how we might think about this relationship, emphasising how aircraft were part of a wider network of material relationships. Since February 2022 such objects have operated in a different political climate. Our lecture will close by reflecting on the impact of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the experience of the material culture of the Cold War.

**Panel 1 – New Thinking in Doctrine and Procurement**

**Paul Stoddart**

**Biography**

Paul Stoddart was commissioned into the Royal Air Force in 1983 as an aero-systems engineer officer and served for eight years. He served on the VC-10 and Hawk and as directing staff on Initial Officer Training at the RAF College Cranwell. After leaving the RAF, he worked as a journalist on a car magazine before joining the Ministry of Defence as an analyst. He was at Farnborough on the Tornado successor programme and Boscombe Down as the programme manager for Harrier and Sea Harrier clearance trials. He attended the Joint Services Command and Staff College, gaining an MA degree in Defence Studies from King’s College London. Paul is a Fellow of the RAeS and a member of the RAeS Air & Space Power Group and Aviation Heritage Group committees. He has written and lectured on a range of Air Power and military aircraft subjects. He organised RAeS conferences on the 1943 Dams Raid, the future of UK air power and air power in 1944 north-western Europe. He presented the RAFM Trenchard Lectures at the University of Wolverhampton in November 2019 on the utility of air power at the strategic level and In November 2021 on RAF aircraft procurement 1945 to 1955.

**Title:** Reconsidering Doctrine and Procurement.

**Abstract**

This paper posits the notion that bureaucratic rigidity had an adverse influence on the progress of the Strategic Bombing Offensive and hence the viable date of the ending of the Second World War. Specifically, the full development of the Supermarine Spitfire was limited owing to a restrictive application of doctrine concerning long-range fighters. Doctrine in the Air Ministry held that long-range fighters were unsuitable for combat with short-range interceptors owing to size and weight issues. The fact that the USAAF produced the North American P-51 Mustang, which proved capable of escorting bombers to Berlin and even Prague and defending them successfully against the short-range interceptors of the Luftwaffe, was as direct a contradiction of Air Ministry doctrine as was possible. The Spitfire was developed as a short-range interceptor with an emphasis on speed and rate of climb. Early attempts to increase its short range were unsuccessful with a crude fixed tank under the port wing. This seemed to confirm the Air Ministry’s view of the viability of increasing its range. The head of the 8th Air Force complained to the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Marshal of the Air Force Portal, when his bombers were unescorted over Germany and suffering very heavy losses why the RAF had 1,400 Spitfires in Britain doing nothing. Portal responded that nothing could be done. General Arnold arranged for two Spitfires to be modified in the USA for long-range but despite this the Air Ministry was uninterested and even deceptive in their evaluation of the American modifications. Extending the Spitfire’s range was clearly possible and indeed. Had reasonable actions been taken earlier, then an escort Spitfire could have escorted 8th Air Force bombers up to 8 months before the Mustang began in its role. Bureaucratic adherence to doctrine and procurement hindered the Allies’ approach to the war.

**John Alexander**

**Biography**

John Alexander is researching the development of British air/land warfare as operational art for a PhD by publication with the University of Cambridge. A former RAF officer, he practised air/land operations in the Falklands in 1982, in Oman and various Middle Eastern campaigns, with airborne, commando and special forces, and as Chief Air in a Corps HQ. He conceptualised joint warfare for the MOD, RAF, Director Special Forces and NATO. He recently led the force development and force preparation branch for the Permanent Joint Headquarters (UK) Group and is now managing director of Polemology Limited training joint operational headquarters. Twice a Chief of the Air Staff Fellow, he has degrees from Newcastle, the Open (two), Cambridge, and Pakistan National Defence universities, and was the Trenchard Fellow at Oxford’s Changing Character of War programme. He has published research in *Air and Space Power Review*, the *RUSI Journal*, and the NATO Joint Air Power Competence Centre, T. E. Lawrence Society and RAF Historical Society’s journals, editing the latter three, numerous book reviews in *Asian Affairs* and the *CAS Reading List*, and co-edited with Dr Harry Raffal *Close Air* *Support: Case Studies on the Integration of Air Power on the Battlefield* (Helion, 2024).

**Title:** Slessor’s *Air Power and Armies* as Air Power History in Theory and Practice.

**Abstract**

This paper re-conceives John Slessor’s *Air Power and Armies* (OUP, 1936) as a rare example of the intersectionality of Air Power historical research and modern military strategy when many Air Power theorists recognised the historical change but disregarded the lessons of the First World War, a trait Thomas Hippler terms ‘ahistorical historicism’. Hence, the near orthodoxy in interwar Britain’s strategic culture of the fear of the bomber as the future of war perpetuated pre-war science fiction and the Daily Mail’s Zeppelin scares. Although *Air Power and Armies* is considered a seminal study of Air Power in support of a land campaign, the literature largely fails to associate its historical analysis with Slessor’s favoured status and later practice.

This paper uses a close reading of Slessor’s treatise, writing, lectures, and papers to find his historical analysis, conclusions and practice somewhat counter the trope of the RAF’s neglect of the Army between the wars. The paper highlights Slessor was both one of Sir Hugh Trenchard’s favoured ‘English merchants’ and a specialist in army cooperation, selected to teach at Camberley. Slessor’s intent was historical analysis to enable practitioners to ‘be wise before the event’ (p. vii). Thus, the book’s case study of the RAF’s failure to affect the 1918 Battle of Amiens beyond the first day used original documents and consulted participants, and criticises the RAF’s commanders at Amiens, including his CAS, Sir John Salmond. Moreover, Slessor’s prioritisation of air superiority and interdiction countered both RAF official history, and RAF doctrine which bifurcated strategic bombing and army cooperation. The paper concludes future CAS Slessor’s analysis was more widely accepted than realised as his role creating Britain’s first multi-functional tactical air force in France in 1940, a precursor to current NATO doctrine, demonstrates.

**Matthew Powell**

**Biography**

Dr Matthew Powell is a Teaching Fellow in Air Power and Strategic Studies at the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell as part of the Portsmouth Military Education Team. He holds a PhD in Modern History from the University of Birmingham. His first book *The Development of British Tactical Air Power, 1940-1943: A History of Army Co-operation Command* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2016. He has published in *War in History*, *The Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, *Air and Space Power Review* and the *British Journal of Military History*, *Defence and Security Analysis* and *Defence Studies*. His current research investigates the relationship between the Air Ministry and the British aircraft industry in the inter-war period. He is a co-editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Professional Military Education* which is currently in progress and is working on the role of risk mitigation in contemporary defence procurement. He is also in demand in the media for comment on current events including the Russo-Ukrainian and Israeli-Gaza conflicts in *The Daily Star*, *PTV World, British Forces Broadcasting* and North American TV and radio.

**Title:** Forging the Future: The Air Ministry and the Advent of All-Metal Aircraft.

**Abstract**

The Air Ministry have been largely criticised for continuing the procure aircraft constructed of wood, string and canvas in the early to mid-1930s when civil and competition aircraft were being constructed from metal. The Air Ministry have been described as backwards in terms of its attitude towards new technologies and their implementation. This was one of a series of technological developments that occurred during the inter-war period and revolutionised the construction of aircraft. It was, however, the most important in terms of the Air Ministry’s relationship with the industry. This lecture will explore the development of the Air Ministry’s policy surrounding the ordering and implementation of all-metal aircraft in the late 1920s. It will demonstrate that current historical thinking on this topic is largely superficial in nature and does not take into account the difficulty of implementing new technological developments in a private industry that could not be compelled to do as the Air Ministry wished. The industry required incentives to change their production methods and re-train their labour force to work with the new materials. Historians have largely ignored or discounted the lead times involved in designing new aircraft and the difficulties of transferring drawing board ideas and concepts into easily produced aircraft. Aircraft were expected to remain in active service for five years after their introduction into the Royal Air Force. This meant that the Air Ministry were required to think of their requirements in aircraft for the next generation in five years’ time as well as begin considering what their requirements would be for the aircraft of ten years. A reliance on unproven technologies could, if they did not meet expectations, lead to a capability gap and presenting a potential risk to British security.

**Panel 2 – Re-Thinking Bomber Command**

**Thomas Withington**

**Biography**

Dr Thomas Withington is an award-winning analyst and writer specialising in electronic warfare, radar and military communications and a Research Associate at the Royal United Services Institute. He has written widely on these subjects for a range of specialist and general publications. He also works as a consultant and advisor in these areas for several leading government and private sector clients. Furthermore, Dr Withington provides regular commentary on security and defence aspects of electromagnetic spectrum use for major media organisations around the world.

**Title:** Heat Seekers: Operation Firebash and the RAF’s use of Napalm against the Luftwaffe.

**Abstract**

Legend has it that a chance meeting between Royal Air Force and United States Army Air Force officers on a train led to the former procuring what would become one of the most controversial weapons ever devised. With the end of the Second World War in Europe in sight, Bomber Command’s 100 Group embarked on a devastating series of raids against *Luftwaffe* airfields during the last month of the conflict. These raids, performed by 100 Group’s Mosquitos, used napalm bombs to set these airfields ablaze and would prove to be highly effective. This paper will detail this lesser-known operation situating it within the wider offensive counter air effort performed by Bomber Command against the *Luftwaffe*. The presentation will debate the extent to which Operation Firebash was successful, or even necessary, particularly as the war was coming to an end. It will endeavour to ascertain why Operation Firebash seems to have been largely forgotten. Was this the result of napalm being so controversial, as the US involvement in the Vietnam War would later highlight? The paper will also examine the extent to which the RAF continued to use napalm in the Cold War era, and the factors that prompted its eventual abandonment.

**Goran Hutinec**

**Biography**

Dr Goran Hutinec is an Assistant Professor at the History department of the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty of the Zagreb University. His professional interests include the history of Second World War in Croatia/Yugoslavia, particularly the issue of Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia, and the Jasenovac concentration camp. He published an article on ‘Allied Aerial Imagery of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp and Killing Centre’ (Holocaust and Genocide Studies, vol.36, issue 2, 2022), and is currently working on a book dealing with aerial warfare on the eastern side of the Adriatic 1943-1945.

**Title:** The Dos and Don’ts of Bombing a Concentration Camp.

**Abstract**

The debate on Allied bombing of Nazi concentration camps primarily deals with Auschwitz, but the fact that one of the most notorious concentration camps in Europe at the time was attacked by the Allied air forces is often forgotten. Jasenovac concentration camp in the Independent State of Croatia was bombed by RAF fighter-bombers flying out of airbases in Italy on 30 March, 5 and 7 April 1945. With rather minor forces and no own losses, the British and Commonwealth pilots managed to demolish some important elements of the camp, forcing the camp guards to hasten its liquidation which happened mere weeks after the aerial attacks. The post-strike reconnaissance is also of great importance for the history of Jasenovac concentration camp, since it provides irrefutable evidence of mass murder committed at the site. This paper will accentuate the lessons which can be taken from the RAF bombing of Jasenovac, starting with the technology needed to identify, reach and successfully target a concentration camp, but also covering the potential loss of life among the inmates and their attitudes towards the dangers of being exposed to a bombing raid. Attempts by the camp guards to falsely accuse Allied airmen of many deaths at the camp in the final weeks of its existence will also be dealt with.

**Patrick Major**

**Biography**

Professor Patrick Major is Professor of Modern History at the University of Reading and has published on Berlin in the Cold War and the cinematic representation of the ‘good German’. He is working on a digital mapping project of the Allied bombing of the Axis in Second World War, on which he gave the keynote address to the RAF Museum annual conference in 2023. A volume on Berlin and the BBC, co-edited with Miles Taylor, is currently in press with De Gruyter.

**Title:** Arthur Harris’s Publicity War: Bomber Command and the BBC, 1942-1945.

**Abstract**

In 1942 the RAF’s Vice-Chief of the Air Staff lamented the unedifying spectacle of different arms of the service vying for publicity, and ‘in their efforts to attract the limelight they sometimes exaggerate and falsify facts. The worst offender is C.-in-C. Bomber Command’, Arthur Harris. Commanders were surrounding themselves with public relations officers, ‘journalists or advertising agents disguised in uniform’, feeding them a ‘continual diet of printed flattery’, leading to ‘a prima donna-ish petulance whenever the customary tributes fail to appear or do not live up to expectations.’ (Freeman to Portal, 16 Sept. 1942). This paper explores Bomber Command’s relations with the British Broadcasting Corporation in Second World War. The BBC occupied a hybrid position as disseminator of official information and voice of the ‘people’s war’. Its nightly news bulletins were a main source of the British public’s knowledge of the area bombing being conducted in its name. The paper explores the sins of omission of the BBC’s air war reporting, failing to explain the true objectives of area bombing, much to the ire of Arthur Harris, leading to a famous flurry of memoranda in autumn 1943. The BBC pushed for more openness and a less scripted approach, in the teeth of opposition from the RAF’s publicity officer, the eccentric Wing-Commander Eric Bentley Beauman. Relations reached such a nadir by 1943 that intervention was required at the highest level, from the Director-General of the BBC to the Chief of the Air Staff. It is often forgotten that the BBC entered the war with an inferiority complex towards the print media, but urged on by the BBC’s Presentation Director, John Snagge, it made a virtue of sound recording to send a generation of flying correspondents such as Richard Dimbleby, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and Ed Murrow on missions over Berlin. (All of the BBC’s wartime casualties died on bombing missions.) But Bomber Command was falling behind the USAAF’s more astute, image-based PR from its daylight raids, including William Wyler’s famous 1943 film, *Memphis Belle*. Ultimately, Harris lost the publicity war.

**William Hudson**

**Biography**

William Hudson is an archaeologist and doctoral research student at the University of Winchester. His research centres around the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past, with a primary focus on military landscapes associated with 20th century global conflict. He is particularly interested in the role of archaeology within a multi-disciplinary historical research environment. While his specialism is in Bomber Command aerodromes, notably within the Yorkshire region, he also has research experience in the physical remains of the Cold War. In addition to his work on the archaeology of recent past, during both 2023 and 2024 William has been an archaeological supervisor on the Anglo-Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi (AGEN), a long-standing international collaborative research project in the Caucasus, Georgia.

**Title:** The Archaeology of Bomber Command Airfields: A Multi-Phase Phenomenological Perspective.

**Abstract**

This paper argues for the increased heritage potential of former Bomber Command airfield material remains. The notion that the vast majority of aerodromes associated with Bomber Command lack unique heritage value, both in terms of being of standardised construction and limited individual historical association is directly challenged. Through introducing the concept of the ‘battlescape’, it is suggested that the airfield landscape is a conflict site geographically remote from the battlefield. The ‘battlescape’ approach will emphasise the direct intangible connection between airfield landscapes of Bomber Command and the sites of bombing in continental Europe.

To achieve this, it will be shown how unique heritage value and significance can be developed through a phenomenological multi-phase multi-disciplinary perspective. This approach combines historic archive records, individual memory and wartime lived experience to further an archaeological assessment and phenomenological landscape exploration. It is argued that the wartime period of an airfield’s active occupation cannot be viewed in isolation from the post-operational process of landscape evolution. By engaging with a multi-phase perspective, it will be demonstrated how the process of ruination and landscape re-development following the airfield’s closure leaves a lasting physical trace, influencing present-day landscape utilisation.

This paper will demonstrate that an understanding of the ‘battlescape’ and process of landscape evolution results in the emergence of a multi-meaning placescape. To explore this, a case study of the former RAF Dalton in North Yorkshire is presented. Constructed as a temporary wartime-built station with both 4 Group and 6 Group Bomber Command from the airfield, at present the site of RAF Dalton has no acknowledged heritage potential. This case study will explore how the outlined approach can facilitate heritage engagement with the memory of aircrew, in addition to ground-based personnel who are largely anonymous within current archaeological assessments.

**Ewen Cameron**

**Biography**

Ewen Cameron is the Curator at the RAF Museum’s Reserve Collection at Stafford.  He joined the Museum in 1997 as the Assistant Curator of Aircraft and Exhibits at London and moved to the Stafford Site in 1999 where he was part of a small team cataloguing the 50,000 plus items held in store.

Through this he gained an excellent knowledge of aircraft structures, systems and uniform items. His expertise has been called upon by television and film companies as well as archaeological and government agencies.

His museum work has included acting as the lead Curator for the First 100 Years exhibition (opened 2018) and the Bomber Command exhibitions (opened 2023).

**Talk Title: What the Other Squadron Did: No. 57 Squadron under the Shadow of 617 Squadron**

**Abstract**

To many, RAF Scampton is synonymous with No 617 Squadron and Operation Chastise.   The Dams Raid dominates the public memory and overshadows the rich history of the other Squadrons who operated from Scampton between 1939 and 1945.  No 57 Squadron being one example.

From the formation of No 617 Squadron on 21 March 1943 to their departure at the end of August 1943, 57 Squadron shared RAF Scampton with the new squadron.

While 617’s story is well known and celebrated, the story of 57 Squadron is often overlooked.  During this period, this typical 5 Group squadron, engaged in the campaigns of the Battle of the Ruhr, the Battle of Hamburg and the road to Berlin.  It participated in many unusual operations including the attacks on Peenemunde, Friedrichshafen and targets in Italy.

By drawing on official documents this paper will build a record of 57 Squadron’s activities, operations and losses over these five months.  It will also look at published histories and personal accounts which add details and provide greater understanding of the campaigns they were involved in.  Contemporary photographs will provide an insight into the equipment used by the squadron, details rarely recorded in the written sources.

This will provide a snapshot of a ‘Main Force’ squadron during a particularly important period for Bomber Command and show that No 57 Squadron deserve to be remembered every bit as much as their more famous RAF Scampton colleagues.

**Panel 3 – Public and Private Roles and their Impact**

**Sophy Higgins**

**Biography**

Sophy Higgins is a second year PhD candidate based in the Freeman Air and Space Institute and the War Studies and History departments at King’s College London. Her PhD is collaborative with the Royal Air Force Museum and is funded by the London Arts and Humanities Partnership. Her research examines the influence of elite women on the culture of the interwar RAF and of aviation more widely. Sophy also holds an MA in Early Modern History and a BA (Hons.) in History from King’s College London.

**Title:** From Margins to Memory: Viscountess Katherine Trenchard and the Gendered Construction of her Husband’s Legacy.

**Abstract**

Historiography has shown the ways in which wives have had their roles obscured or reduced to the domestic sphere and has acknowledged the need for historians to redress this imbalance (Ann Oakley, 2021; Hannah West, 2021). The paper aims to apply this to the context of the Royal Air Force by focusing on the contributions of Viscountess Katherine Trenchard. It will consider the themes of spousal support and emotional labour before examining the notes, scrapbooks and correspondence that she created and collated to understand how she actively shaped her husband’s legacy, while hers has remained hidden in a few pages of his bibliography. In particular, it will consider the ways in which ViscountessTrenchard challenged her husband’s biographer, Andrew Boyle, and consider whether his acceptance or rejection of these challenges has permeated ideas of Trenchard’s legacy since the biography’s publication in 1962. It will argue that Viscountess Trenchard played a crucial role in shaping her husband’s legacy, while revealing the broader ways in which women’s historical contributions have been obscured in the context of air power history.

**Caroline Devonport**

**Biography**

Caroline is a Teaching Fellow on the BA Costume Design programme at the University of Salford with a research focus on women’s uniforms in the Royal Navy and the wider maritime sector. She recently completed a Masters by Research examining the evolution of Royal Navy uniforms and will soon begin a PhD exploring women's uniforms in the Royal Navy and maritime industries.

Her research examines the historical development, functionality, and cultural significance of uniform design in traditionally male-dominated environments. She is particularly interested in how uniforms shape perceptions of authority, professionalism, and inclusion, as well as their role in reinforcing or challenging societal norms.

Alongside her research, Caroline is passionate about developing inclusive teaching environments and widening participation for students from all backgrounds. She is committed to ensuring accessibility in education and supporting diverse learners in achieving their full potential.

Caroline’s work contributes to broader discussions on gender and representation within the maritime sector, shedding light on the experiences of women in naval and maritime history. Through her research and teaching, she aims to deepen understanding of the impact of uniform design on identity and equality in these fields.

**Title:** Tailored for the Skies: The Evolution of Women’s Flight Gear in the Royal Navy.

**Abstract**

The increasing integration of women into naval aviation has necessitated the development of specialised flying uniforms that cater to their physiological and operational needs. Historically, flight suits and associated gear were designed primarily for male pilots and aircrew, leading to fit and functionality challenges for female personnel. This paper examines the evolution of women’s flying uniforms within the Royal Navy, considering historical advancements, design challenges, and technological innovations.

Initially, female naval personnel were confined to support roles in aviation, primarily within the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS). However, with policy changes in the late 20th century allowing women to take on frontline aviation roles, the need for tailored flight gear became apparent. Traditional male-oriented designs often failed to provide the necessary mobility, comfort, and safety features required for high-performance aerial operations. The Royal Navy, in collaboration with defence contractors, has since developed gender-specific uniforms addressing these concerns.

Key challenges in designing women’s flight suits include anatomical differences, compatibility with life-saving equipment, temperature regulation, and durability. Differences between men’s and women’s uniforms include adjustments in sizing, protective gear adaptations, and G-suit modifications to accommodate physiological variations. Technological advancements, such as ergonomic tailoring, fire-retardant materials, and modular layering systems, have further enhanced the effectiveness of these uniforms.

Through case studies and field testing, this paper evaluates the impact of these improvements on operational efficiency and personnel retention. Standardisation efforts across NATO and the UK Ministry of Defence continue to refine these uniforms, ensuring optimal performance for female aviators. The development of specialist women’s flying uniforms represents a significant step towards gender inclusivity and operational excellence in naval aviation, reinforcing the Royal Navy’s commitment to equipping all personnel with the best possible gear for their roles.

**Russell Shanks**

**Biography**

Russell Shanks is a PhD researcher at Durham University. His subject is 'The SOE, British Covert Action, and Digital Wargames', investigating the representation of the SOE in videogames as part of the Leverhulme funded project ‘The SOE, Covert Action, and the British Cultural Imaginary’.

He previously attended Aberystwyth University with an MA Intelligence & Strategic Studies. He has 10 years’ experience in heritage and museums. This includes with The Royal Air Force Museum as a Visitor Experience Supervisor at the Midlands and London sites where he has led and developed several of the museum’s public tours including *Spies in the Sky* and the *Bomber Command Tour.*

His research interests are in British special operations, espionage, intelligence, and Air Power. The SOE game he recommends is *The Saboteur* (Pandemic Studios, 2009) and he is still looking for a videogame that features a Westland Lysander.

**Title**: “It’s just a game”: Understanding Representations of British Second World War Air Power and Special Operations in Digital Wargames.

**Abstract**

Videogames are a dominant force in the entertainment industry. According to *Forbes* (2023) ‘Global revenue generated by the gaming industry is greater than the global revenue generated by the music and movie industries combined’. Digital Wargames, particularly Second World War-themed games, rank among the most popular videogame franchises, with *Call of Duty* achieving 425 million+ sales across its titles since its first launch in October 2003. The mass appeal and global reach of digital wargames means that their representations of historic events, organisations and operations can have a powerful influence on the ways in which we understand warfare past, present and near-future. Game designers have the power to subject audiences to messages that can shape their perceptions of the historic use of Air Power and special operations.

This paper will outline some of the challenges and opportunities presented through critical Game Studies for understanding British Air Power and special operations in the Second World War. The ‘new’ media of digital wargames presents a unique set of sources within which to research the representation, legacy, and mythology of relationships between the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Special Operations Executive (SOE). These include understanding the application of special operations in support of (and instead of) applications of Air Power from game levels featured in *Call of Duty* (Activision, 2003), *The Saboteur* (Pandemic Studios, 2009), and *Sniper Elite: Resistance* (Rebellion Entertainment, 2025) among others.

Methodologically, this paper will show that the study of military aviation in such games helps us track not simply where videogames deviate from the historical record, but more interestingly to explore the reasons why and what effects this may have, including the use of ‘selective authenticity’ and reflecting wider cultural understandings of the Second World War.

**Panel 4 – The Multinational Context of an Air Force**

**William Gillispie**

**Biography**

William Gillispie is a doctoral student in the History Department of Rice University. He earned a BA in History at Tulane University where his honours thesis analysed the way enslaved people rebelled and resisted British occupation in Saint Lucia during the French and Haitian Revolutions. He earned his MA in History from Tulane University, transitioning his research to the role of Liberia as a participant and combatant in the First World War. His current focus is on how black soldiers and intellectuals understood, participated and interacted with one another during the First World War and how that led to civil rights, anti-colonial and Pan-African movements of the early 20th century.

William also earned his teacher certification in Louisiana and was a high school educator for six years. He taught Civics at Riverdale High School in Jefferson Parish, then World History, AP Psychology and AP Economics at Willow Charter School in Orleans Parish.

**Title:** Before Tuskegee: African Americans in Flight and Combat in the First World War.

**Abstract**

Charles Francis’s book, *The Tuskegee Airmen,* states that while the 1930s graduation and acceptance of black Army Air Corps officers was a great success, “the battle by Negroes to be accepted for military pilot training began during World War 1.” Little known and with only limited press or historical coverage, in early 1918, four African Americans officers, graduates of the segregated Fort Des Moines, Iowa training camp, were redeployed to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where they would learn aviation skills for their service in the newly formed 92nd Division. Though none would complete the training, two other black Americans would attempt to join the Air Service, while a final pilot would join France’s Air Service, and though rejected from transferring to US command in 1917, nonetheless became the first African American to participate in aerial combat. African Americans, therefore, were indeed, “battling” for access to the US Air Service in the First World War, in multiple ways and for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is worth exploring questions related to their service and its implications. First, what did flight and aerial combat mean for African Americans? How did they envision their service to the US Army Air Service in contrast to other forms of military service in the war? And who were these seven African Americans and why were they so eager to fly?

This paper, based on primary sources and archival research, will explore these questions and contribute new understandings to uncover the story of these seven black pilots and set them in the context of the larger Great War and history of aviation in the United States. By recovering these early black aviators, it will address the themes of race, citizenship, and one of the 20th century’s most influential pieces of technology.

**Steve Paget**

**Biography**

Dr Steve Paget is the Senior Development Lead, Research and Knowledge Exchange at Anglia Ruskin University, Peterborough. Previous roles include serving as the Military Programmes Director at the University of Lincoln and as the Director of Air and Space Power Education for the University of Portsmouth, based at Royal Air Force College Cranwell. His research interests focus on multinational military cooperation and the dynamics of coalition operations. He has published extensively on multinational military operations and is the editor of *Allies in Air Power: A History of Multinational Air Operations* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2021).

**Title:** The Global Air Force: The Royal Air Force’s History in its Multinational Context.

**Abstract**

Despite being perceived as quintessentially British in popular culture, the Royal Air Force (RAF) has been an international organisation in every sense of the word. The RAF has benefitted, throughout its history, from the contributions of personnel drawn from other nations. Personnel from over forty nations served in the British air services during the First World War, including, for example, 900-1,100 Americans. During the Second World War, furthermore, approximately forty percent of the RAF’s airmen originated from the wider Empire. Through a range of avenues, such as lateral transfers and personnel exchanges, the RAF has continued to benefit from the contributions of international personnel. The RAF has also profited from deploying personnel to serve alongside other air forces, such as the attachment of maritime patrol aircraft crews to multinational partners under Project Seedcorn to facilitate the introduction of the P-8 Poseidon aircraft.

In addition, the RAF has, since its foundation, engaged in operations overseas alongside a range of multinational partners from the First World War to the contemporary period. The RAF has been called upon to provide niche or missing capabilities to enhance coalition efforts, including during Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. It has not just been the experience of operations, however, that has underpinned the RAF’s multinational outlook. Defence engagement – from exercises to exchanges – has promoted the development of interoperability with key multinational partners.

This presentation will reflect on the international composition of personnel at different points throughout the RAF’s history and address the importance of a global outlook and multinational mindset to the service. It will analyse aspects of cultural, operational, organisational and social history through an international lens to place the RAF’s story in its multinational context.

**Russell Smith**

**Biography**

Russell Smith is a PhD researcher at the University of Glasgow, where he is exploring Caribbean and West African RAF wartime service and volunteers’ legacies. He previously studied at the University of Leicester and Manchester Metropolitan University, undertaking research in the College of Arts. Russell is also a published fiction author.

Formerly a Heritage Ambassador for the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, Russell has also been a Research Volunteer with the Royal Air Force Museum, with a focus on exploring the RAF’s wartime and post-war race relations, which he continues to research for his PhD.

**Title:** The Price of a Wartime Squadron: Behind the Caribbean Titled Squadrons.

**Abstract**

The expense of the war effort is a common topic in the history of conflict. During the Second World War the RAF had to contend with numerous cost pressures, including the purchase of aircraft, personnel training and general maintenance, and fundraising for such had to extend beyond the service itself. A number of wartime squadrons were named, in sponsorship, largely from the wider reaches of the British Empire, including a number named for Caribbean nations.

This paper will examine the financial and political background behind such squadron naming, as well as further implications to the islands themselves in terms of war contribution, on the side of both their own national volunteers for service, and also challenges from the local governments with regards to their interests versus the wider agenda of the British Empire.

**Emily Walton**

**Biography**

After graduating from King’s College London, Emily now works at the Air Historical Branch (RAF) as a researcher with a focus on historic casualty identification. In the past, she has volunteered with the International Bomber Command Memorial, RAF College Cranwell and Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre (formerly RAF Woodhall Spa).

**Title:** Burning Blue: RAF Culture and Nationality Explored through ‘High Flight.’

**Abstract**

Culture and nationality are two words that are often used but are difficult to define. While they may seem like they are set in stone, when examined closely it becomes clear that ideas about national identity and who belongs are vague and often change especially in the context of the Second World War and aviation. Statistics, such as there were 60 nations involved in Bomber Command, often hide the complexity and ethnical diversity that made up the RAF and became a bedrock for national myths. Similarly, the way historians and people have interacted with the Second World War have changed since its conclusion, leading to more fluctuations in the debates and discussions on culture and identity than might previously be considered on first glance. All these nuances can be explored and understood more through the study of one individual.

Many are aware of the poem ‘High Flight’ both in the aviation world and the public, but less know the story of the author, Pilot Officer John Magee Jr. Born in China to an American father and British mother, Magee’s national identity can, and has, changed over the years since his death in 1941. A relatable character with a story that touches many, a focus on Magee and the variance of his narrative helps us understand the concept of national identity, who influences it and the changes society, and the military have undergone since 1945. It also gives us the opportunity to connect the debate to wider academic fields, the military and the general public, contextualising current political arguments and providing background to current issues facing the Royal Air Force.

**Panel 5 – Myth-Making and Memory**

**Damien Accoulon**

**Biography**

Dr Damien Accoulon is an Associate Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Tours. He defended his dissertation on aviation aces in German and French society (1914-1939) at the universities of Paris Nanterre and Brunswick in 2023. Damien is also the author of a critical biography of French ace René Fonck, published in 2018.

**Title:** Airmen and the Myth of the “Knight of the Air” in Germany and France (1914-1939).

**Abstract**

The myth of the “knight of the air” developed at the same time as aviation during the Great War. It was shaped by journalists, but perpetuated with the complicity of the aviators themselves, who never contradicted it. Combat techniques evolved towards engagements based on surprise and superior force – far from the romanticized medieval jousts – but the descriptions of confrontations kept their noble aspect.

The conditions under which aviators’ personal accounts were published explain this, as their texts were edited to fit – ever more closely – the fantasised standards of the “knight of the air”. The texts most in line with this fantasy are also the most reprinted (e.g. Manfred von Richthofen’s and Georges Guynemer’s). Pilots had no interest in questioning it, since it enhanced their reputation and thus their careers whether civilian or military. After the war, the aviation industry made commercial use of this idealised image of the pilot. No new evidence, in Germany or France, contradicted this wartime fiction.

The aeronautical microcosm (in the Bourdieusian sense of the term) thus functioned as a lobby that defended its interests through a common discourse, cultivating a virtuous image of aviation. This discourse, with its emphasis on the French “Aces” and the German “Pour le mérite” pilots, helped to conceal the darker side of the industry: bombing, despite the doctrinal developments and practical operations carried out in the 1920s and 1930s.

This paper intends to draw on the German and French texts and archives that remain unexploited in English-language historiography to make this case. It will compare some original writings with their published versions, and carry out a sociological analysis of the stakeholders, to put into perspective the historical construction of the myth of the “knight of the air”.

**Jonathan Addison**

**Biography**

Dr Jonathan Addison graduated from the University of Sunderland with a Bachelor’s degree in History and Politics with a specialisation in war and conflict studies. He has a PhD in Machine Learning from the University of Sunderland and an MBA from the University of Durham. He has spent much of his career analysing data sets for non-linear patterns in engineering and business and has recently begun to apply machine learning technologies to behavioural analytics problems including key performance indicators impacting the survival of aces during the Second World War. He is a qualified private pilot.

Title: Insights from Machine Learning on the Survival of top Luftwaffe Aces in the Second World War.

**Abstract**

This paper examines the variables that may have contributed to the survival of the top Luftwaffe fighter pilots during the Second World War. It will consider those pilots who attained ace status (five or more confirmed aircraft destroyed) and scored more than 100 victories. Following a literature review of pilot aptitude tests and selection procedures employed by the Luftwaffe, several websites were accessed for biographical details of Luftwaffe aces, including information on education, social class, previous work experience, military service, and previous flying experience, and cross referenced this with several studies on the Luftwaffe and her aces contained in online databases and texts and journals on the Luftwaffe. By adding additional information on the social and educational backgrounds of successful figures in other aspects of German society at this time, a dataset was constructed from a list of possible variables which may have influenced a pilot’s ability. To ensure the data set was as informative as possible, studies from other fields where machine learning has been used were consulted to predict survivability rates or extract the most significant data from larger data sets. To this end, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), Genetic Algorithms (GA) and Sensitivity Analysis was applied to reduce the dimensionality of the data set, thereby capturing the most significant features relating to the ace’s survival. In the paper, the results the results obtained will be compared to the top ten highest scoring Luftwaffe aces. The results show each method’s focus on different aspects of the data set (broad general trends as opposed to specific, notable events) and reinforce some of the findings from previous historical studies. The paper will expand upon their findings by providing valuable insights into the determinants of pilot survivability within the Luftwaffe during the Second World War.

**Mark Russell**

**Biography**

After graduating with a History degree, Mark Russell worked in professional services until his retirement on 31 January 2025. He completed the MA in Air Power: History, Theory and Evolution at the University of Birmingham in December 2017.

Since then, he has published articles and reviews on a number of diverse RAF-related topics for the RAF’s *Air and Space Power Review* and the *RAF Historical Society Journal* among others. He has published a range of articles in *The Aviation Historian* on armaments and is currently completing an article on 333 Squadron Royal Norwegian Air Force’s operations from Fife 1943-45.

He presented a paper on ‘Females in fast jets’ at the RAF Museum’s September 2023 conference, and in November 2024 delivered another RAF Museum Lecture on ‘Squadron Leader Alfred Lammer, DFC and Bar: The Masterly Manipulator.’ He hopes to begin a PhD in October 2025 on the topic of ‘The experience of female aircrew in the RAF since 1989.’

**Title:** The RAF’s Management of its Image since 1945: Why no Battle of Britain Square?

**Abstract**

From its earliest days, the Royal Air Force (RAF) (and its predecessor, the Royal Flying Corps) was very conscious of the need to manage its image as part of obtaining and increasing public support for itself – to the extent that during the Second World War, some claimed that ‘RAF’ stood for ‘Royal Advertising Force.’ This paper will look at how the RAF understood the need to maintain and modernise its image after the end of the Second World War and to ensure it maintained public support. This support was important for several reasons including, ensuring recruitment targets were met (especially after the end of National Service in 1963) and to support its case in the budget battles in Whitehall.

The paper will draw on a range of sources, including archive materials from the Air Ministry, newspapers and other media, popular fiction (including children’s fiction), and recruitment materials. This will provide a starting point for looking at how the British population looked on the RAF and aviation more widely during this period, how the RAF believed it was perceived, and how accurately it assessed the mood of the nation in terms of its support for the RAF and aviation generally.

**Ewan Burnet**

**Biography**

Ewan joined the RAF Museum as Assistant Curator of Film and Sound in 2008, after previously working in the Imperial War Museums Film and Video Archive. Now Curator of Film and Sound, his responsibilities include care, development and access for the museum’s film and sound collection, in addition to oral history interviews with a wide range of RAF veterans.

**Talk Title:** Never let the Truth get in the Way of a Good Story: How Oral History Can Contribute to our Understanding of Air Power History.

**Abstract**

Historical sources come in a variety of different forms; written documents are very often the primary source, while film, photos, art and physical objects can also provide different perspectives. All historical sources have their drawbacks, and the best outcomes often result from the use of several different sources in conjunction with each other.

This paper will look at the contribution that oral history can make to the study of Air Power history. Making particular use of examples taken from the RAF Museum’s archive, it will be shown that first-hand accounts can give a very different perspective on historical events and developments by, for example, either augmenting or challenging the account of events given in written sources.

The paper will further examine how oral history can give an insight into air force culture - ‘the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society’ - and how this in turn can impact on the conduct of operations and the delivery of air power. It will be shown that, while first-hand accounts can contribute to our understanding of technological and conceptual developments, they can also have the potential to link these developments to cultural factors. The question of how to define and investigate culture is an interesting one and will also be considered.

All sources have their flaws; nothing is completely reliable.  First-hand accounts can be distorted by, for example, memory flaws, or by a desire to portray and think about events in a certain way. But when sources are used in conjunction with each other, the impact of these flaws can be reduced, new perspectives developed and our understanding of past events very much enhanced.

**Panel 6 – The Environmental Impact of Air Power**

**Witali Gerber**

**Biography**

Witali Gerber is a curator and research associate at the Bundeswehr Military History Museum in Berlin-Gatow. His research critically examines the nexus between youth culture and the Luftwaffe in Germany. His academic background in Military Studies, pursued at the University of Potsdam, informs his work across the fields of conflict studies, contemporary history, and military ethics.

Gerber’s work has contributed to a deeper scholarly and public engagement with the cultural history of the Luftwaffe and its entanglement with youth imaginaries in modern Germany. He has pursued this through a range of curatorial and digital history initiatives, most notably *Youth(-culture) and Air Forces in Germany* and *Berlin Airlift Remembered*. His research operates at the intersection of museology, public history, and digital transformation, with particular emphasis on interpretive strategies in the military-historical field.

He has presented his research at numerous international academic and museological institutions, including King’s College London, Aarhus University, the Canada Aviation and Space Museum, the Royal Air Force Museum, the UK National Archives, and within the professional networks of ICOMAM and ICOM-CIMUSET.

In his recent scholarship, Witali Gerber has addressed the evolving landscape of military museology and public memory. His publications include critical analyses of technological innovation in *Digital Transformations in Aviation Museums: Strategies, Challenges, and Prospects*; the dynamics of memory politics in *Shared Memories, Divergent Narratives: The Berlin Airlift in Transnational Commemoration and Archival Practice*; the interpretive role of simulation in *The Cultural Impact of War Gaming on Military History Museums*; and the ideological implications of militarized youth imaginaries in *From Toys to Turbines: Cultural Pathways to German Youth Enchantment with the Luftwaffe*.

**Title:** Air Power through Manpower: The Institutionalisation of Child Conscription in the Luftwaffe’s Flakhelfer Program.

**Abstract**

During the Second World War, Germany’s air defence—particularly its extensive Flak (antiaircraft) units—proved instrumental in contesting Allied aerial dominance over the German homeland. Between 1941 and 1945, these units not only integrated advanced technical and tactical innovations, but also expanded significantly, notwithstanding severe manpower shortages across multiple theatres of war. A crucial element in this expansion was the systematic conscription of minors into Luftwaffe Flak units. From 1943 onward, more than 200,000 adolescents aged 15 to 17 were mobilised as Flakhelfer, constituting a historically singular labour force charged with countering the intensified Allied bombing campaign.

This extensive reliance on child soldiers distinguished the Wehrmacht from other belligerent forces engaged in the global conflict. This large-scale recruitment of underage personnel had deep repercussions for an entire generation of German youths, many of whom perished or suffered substantial physical and psychological injuries. Far from constituting mere historical footnotes, these young combatants occupied central positions in the operational framework of German air defence, often enduring harsh disciplinary practices and exposure to relentless combat conditions. This study critically investigates the institutional and organizational mechanisms that enabled the Luftwaffe to employ teenage conscripts on such a wide scale, illuminating the ideological and wartime pressures that prompted the Luftwaffe to adopt increasingly extreme measures.

Moreover, the research challenges the conventional portrayals of youthful heroism by examining the emotional and transformative personal experiences of these adolescent soldiers. Drawing on a diverse array of archival documentation, museum artifacts, and detailed firsthand testimonies, this work sheds light on the daily realities faced by Flakhelfer during some of the most brutal phases of the air war between 1943 and 1945. By situating these experiences within the broader context of total war mobilization, the study underscores the lasting effects of wartime service on those conscripted as minors and offers critical insights into the underexplored dimensions of Germany’s war effort.

**Alastair Noble**

**Biography**

Dr Alastair Noble is Deputy Head of the Air Historical Branch (RAF) and has been a Historian in the Branch since 2015. In this capacity he has written narrative volumes on Defence Policy and the Royal Air Force since 1970. He is the author of books, articles and contributions to edited volumes encompassing aspects of modern political, military and diplomatic history.

**Title:** Winning Hearts and Minds? New Perspectives of the RAF in the British Zone of Germany, 1945-1950.

**Abstract**

This paper takes a fresh approach to the RAF experience in the British Zone of Germany in the immediate postwar period. It is based on little-known contemporary sources from diverse strands of the Air Force which have recently become available and draws on other material which has been long neglected. These accounts provide a unique snapshot of RAF priorities and challenges faced in north-west Germany from differing perspectives.

Eye-witness testimony from RAF Roman Catholic chaplains at the 'Hinsley House' retreat detail the difficulties encountered during this period at Gronau/Leine south of Hanover. Meanwhile, the recently published diaries and photographs of Flight Lieutenant Peter Harrison provide a unique perspective of the situation in Luneburg and beyond. More official contemporary interpretations at either end of the timeframe can be found in the monthly newspaper of No. 124 Wing at RAF Lubeck for 1945-46 and from the souvenir booklet produced in 1950 by No. 85 Group stationed at Uetersen near Hamburg. Their contents and imagery provide fascinating insights.

The devastating impact of RAF Air Power on north-west Germany was visible all around in 1945. This paper will discuss what followed, highlighting the Service’s key contribution to stability and cohesion during the immediate postwar period, as it laid the foundations for a shift from occupation to partnership and a five-decade long presence in the country.

These new and neglected sources enhance a historiography which has suffered from a lack of scholarship and will help redress the balance arising from the prevailing Army-centric approach of what has been produced. This is epitomised by AHB(RAF)’s truncated RAF Germany narrative and the concentration which even recent studies of British Forces Germany have placed on the Army.

**Stuart Hadaway and Dean Gibson**

**Biography**

**Squadron Leader Dean Gibson** is an Air and Space Operator (Fighter Controller), with 38 years of Service, and was the HQ Air Infrastructure lead on the project.

**Stuart Hadaway** is the Historian at the Air Historical Branch (RAF), and the lead Branch researcher on this project.

**Title:** RAF Investigation into Legacy Munitions at RAF Fauld.

**Abstract**

In November 1944, a tragic accident saw the detonation of a damaged munition at the RAF bomb dump controlled by No. 21 Maintenance Unit at RAF Fauld. The resulting chain of explosions, totalling between 3,500 and 4,000 tons, destroyed large sections of the underground dump and the area above it, leaving a vast crater which still scars the landscape. Over the following year, the damaged areas of the site were gradually excavated and as many of the remaining munitions as possible were removed, while the standard work of No. 21 MU went on around them. The site would remain active into the 1970s, and today, the crater and immediate surrounding area are still owned and monitored by the RAF.

Since the war, there have been pervasive rumours significant amounts of unexploded ordnance, including chemical weapons, remain on site, posing a risk to the surrounding area. In 2021, HQ Air Infrastructure were tasked with conducting a risk management survey of the site. With the assistance of the Air Historical Branch (RAF), an extensive survey was conducted of the surviving maps and documents, relating to the explosion and clearance work, and to the regular EOD surveys conducted across the site since. For the first time, a definitive report was commissioned into the site. Over three years, RAF and AHB personnel conducted a full survey to assess the most common stories and legends about the site, and drawing definitive conclusions relating to the actual risk. This paper will examine the methodology used and share the key conclusions of the report, overturning many of the commonly held beliefs about the site.

**Gary Willis**

**Biography**

Dr Gary Willis had a first career in international development charities and the trade union movement. In 2015, having always been interested in the environment, British history and the Second World War, he undertook an MRes in Historical Research at the Institute of Historical Research, followed by a PhD, receiving his doctorate from the University of Bristol in 2023. His thesis investigated the impact on Britain’s landscape of the military-industrial sites – military aircraft and munitions factories - that were built to support the Second World War effort – and how some of these locations were contested by civil society. His more general research interest is the environmental impact of warfare. He has published two journal articles, an article in ‘History Today’, numerous blogs, and has spoken at several in-person and online international and domestic conferences and seminars. He has a book contract with Bloomsbury Academic for an adaptation of his thesis into his first monograph, with a likely publication date of late 2026; its working title is *Fields Into Factories: the Military-Industrial Enclosure of Britain’s Countryside In The Second World War*.

**Title:** The Dambusters’ Raid: Technical Ingenuity, Dashing Heroism and Environmental Warfare.

**Abstract**

There is something of a televisual tradition of showing the 1955 *The Dam Busters* film on terrestrial TV on Boxing Day. It continues to perpetuate the narrative of the operation as emblematic of British “boffinry” and dashing heroism.

But unlike the film, actual history is hardly ever black and white. History can be complicated. It can be paradoxical. It can be uncomfortable. It can be messy. Operation Chastise – to use its proper name - was the paper will argue, an act of environmental warfare, and that this needs to sit uneasily alongside – not instead of – the ingenuity and heroism already acknowledged.

Operation Chastise as an act of environmental warfare was two-fold. Firstly, water was seen as an agent of environmental destruction, using the bombing of dam infrastructure to unleash the power of water to destroy in one fell swoop a number of industrial targets that it would otherwise have taken repeated bomber raids to attack. And secondly, the environment as victim – water courses damaged and polluted, agricultural land inundated by flood waters and rendered uncultivable, farm animals drowned. Not to mention the social, human toll. The operation was deliberately scheduled to occur at the time of year when the waters behind the dams were at a high level; civilian populations were an implied secondary target – not just “collateral damage”, as one of the intended consequences of the raid was the disruption of the domestic drinking water supply.

The paper revisits National Archives records that have been pored over many times by conventional appraisals of the operation, with the intention of highlighting information that has previously been ignored or under-explored, in order to develop a more holistic understanding of an iconic event in the RAF’s history.

**Panel 7 – Looking to the Future of Air Power**

**Ian Thompson**

**Biography**

Ian Thompson served for 25 years as a RAF navigator on Hercules and Nimrod R1 aircraft as well as instructing and various staff tours, including Headquarter Number 38 Group and 16 Air Assault Brigade, leaving in 2012.

Ian’s first Air Power essay was at Intermediate Command and Staff Course in 2004, and subsequently became the Deputy Station Air Warfare Officer at RAF Cranwell, where he led the RAF Cranwell Falklands War 25th Anniversary commemoration. Separately, Ian delivered a summarised version of this lecture on the Royal Aeronautical Society Lecture Circuit, including a contemporary (for the time) hypothesis of how the UK could use Air Power to liberate the Falklands if there was a re-match.

In 2011, Ian was on the first cohort of Peter Gray’s Air Power MA at Birmingham. His dissertation was “to what extent did British Defence Policy in the 1960s and 1970s affect aircraft carrier employment in the Falkland Islands’ conflict?”. Ian is now a fourth year part-time PhD candidate with the University of Portsmouth researching RAF Air Transport capability development from 1970 to 1989. He has previously delivered RAF Museum Conference Papers on the Mason Review and the use of air transport in overseas interventions.

**Title:** Optimising Air Transport Survivability – or not.

**Abstract**

On 30 January 2005, RAF Hercules XV179 crashed north of Baghdad killing all on board after the right wing was struck by a rocket propelled grenade. One finding from the subsequent Board of Enquiry was the mitigating effect that could have been afforded by a fuel explosion inhibiting system; this had been identified years earlier, but not implemented at this time. However, this was not the only instance of a failure in air transport survivability. This paper aims to explain some of the issues around protecting air transport aircraft on operations and how this has been successful, or not.

The Air Power literature generally offers little on air transport regarding its role and even less when analysing its operational outcomes. This could be influenced by the popularity of works on kinetic effect in air power study. Furthermore, the difficulty of convincing the political masters to spend money on things that they don’t necessarily understand, and are difficult to explain and conceptualise, may have impact here. Consequently, these points invite the examination of a fundamental issue regarding military air transport - is the potential risk of death, damage and destruction of the aircraft worth the cost of protecting them?

This question can be addressed partly through analysis of the extant literature, albeit a selection of fragments in disparate sources. Furthermore, the Hansard record offers some comment in various debates on the issue over the years. However, given the sensitive nature of the operational requirements, threat assessments, delivery demands and technical solutions that were on offer or eventually utilised, archival sources and more contemporary reports offer the greatest clarity into hitherto neglected factors. These facets variously caused concern, promoted confidence, or in the case of XV179’s crew led to overdue equipment upgrades that could have been more proactively introduced many years earlier.

**Andrew Renwick**

**Biography**

After graduation from Durham University, Andrew entered the museum world. While working at Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery he helped as a volunteer at the Aerospace Museum at Cosford, before joining the staff of the RAF Museum in London in 1985.

After working in the Library, Andrew was appointed Curator of Photographs in 1989, a post he still holds today. The collection has seen many changes, not least with the adoption of digital technology and the collections management system. Andrew is also the Museum’s Copyright Officer and has been lead curator for a number of exhibitions, including Historic Hendon, the Battle of Britain and Higher, Faster Further, the interwar exhibition.

Andrew has given papers and presentations in many locations and had articles published in both aviation and service journals. He completed work on ‘Camera Above the Clouds Volume 3’ following the death of the previous compiler, and is the author of *RAF Hendon; Birthplace of Aerial Power.*

**Title:** Offence or Defence?

**Abstract**

This paper was prompted by presentations from Wing Commander Dheeraj Bhasin and Michael Terry at the RAF Historical Society Seminar at the RAF Museum on 9 August 2025. The former referred to the incorporation of pilots from the Tornado F3 and Jaguar forces in Typhoon Squadrons, whereas the latter highlighted the popularity of the fighter pilot in popular literature.

The First World War saw the separation of pilots into different roles, namely the reconnaissance or bomber pilot and the fighter pilot. This division would have its consequences in the interwar period, the former busy overseas, often at risk from ground fire, while the latter concentrated on impressing the crowds at Hendon, safe from an enemy, treating the RAF as an exclusive flying club.

The Second World War, however, brought the fighter pilot to the fore, especially during the Battle of Britain. The experience of the senior officers would have a major influence on the prosecution of the campaign, former fighter pilots performing better than others as Group Commanders in the defence of Britain.

The postwar period saw a gradually consolidation of roles within the RAF. Eventually the reconnaissance or bomber pilot operated in the offensive support role while fighter pilots undertook air defence. The adoption of the Typhoon and Lightning II, however, saw the roles merged. This paper looks at the changes in more detail.

**Samuel Oyewole**

**Biography**

Dr Samuel Oyewole is a Research Fellow at the Ocean Regions Programme of the Department of Political Sciences and the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS), University of Pretoria, South Africa, and a lecturer at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria. His research interests cover African affairs, crisis management, development, aerospace, defence and security studies, and international relations. His articles have appeared in many reputable journals. He is the author of *Utilitarianism in Outer Space: Space Policy, Socioeconomic Development and Security Strategies in Nigeria and South Africa* (Springer, 2024) and co-editor of several books.

**Title:** African Perspectives on Air Power in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Automation of Warfare.

**Abstract**

Over the last century, Air Power has been shaped and reshaped by advancements in technology and human factors, such as military leadership, doctrine, strategy, personnel training, skills, agility, endurance, innovations, and discipline, among others. However, human factors in Air Power are declining with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation of warfare. Although most countries are against the use of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), the militarisation and weaponisation of AI have increased. These developments are dominantly approached from European, Eurasian, East Asian, and North American perspectives, with marginal reflections from Africa and the Global South. Hence, this presentation offers the hardly heard African perspectives on how AI is changing airpower and warfare. Despite the common African position on LAWS, the continent has witnessed notable development, adoption, deployment, and use of AI-aided weapons systems, including armed and unarmed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). First, foreign military powers, such as the US and France, have deployed and employed UAVs with AI-aided autonomous features in Africa. Second, in a market dominated by China and Türkiye, several African countries have purchased foreign-made UAVs with AI-aided autonomous features, which some have deployed in their recent military engagements. Third, Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, and Nigeria, among others, are investing in local production of UAVs with AI integration. These three dimensions of the AI and Air Power nexus are driven by the development and security interests of African countries, with multidimensional consequences for domestic, regional, and global politics, security, and socio-economic affairs. This presentation examines these developments, the driving forces, and the implications, as critical elements of African perspectives on airpower in the age of AI-driven autonomous weapons and automated (and perhaps post/de-humanised) warfare.

**Notes**