

Hearts, Minds and Airspace: Air Power, Humanitarianism and Counterinsurgency

Thursday 10-Friday 11 September 2026

Hosted at the Royal Air Force Museum, London, the two-day conference will critically examine the entanglements of Air Power, counterinsurgency (COIN) and humanitarianism. The conference will have an interdisciplinary approach, including papers from history, international relations and defence studies among other disciplines.

Air Power has become a central – yet often underexamined – dimension of contemporary counterinsurgency and humanitarian practice. From airstrikes, drones and surveillance platforms to humanitarian airlifts, medical evacuations, and "hearts and minds" campaigns conducted from above, the sky has emerged as a key site where violence, care, governance and legitimacy intersect.

The conference aims to explore how Air Power shapes counterinsurgency strategies and humanitarian practices across historical and contemporary contexts, and how these dynamics are experienced, justified, contested and resisted.

The keynote for this year's conference will be presented by Dr Edward Burke, whose paper is entitled 'The RAF and Counterinsurgency in South Arabia and Oman in the 1950s: Venoms, Levies and the Special Air Service.'

The RAF Museum will be live-streaming the conference with access provided via the Museum's Crowdcast channel, via <https://www.crowdcast.io/c/rafm-conference-2026>

Royal Air Force Museum Conference 2026

#RAFMConference

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

Thursday 10 September

Day 1	
9:00 AM	Registration (Teas and Coffees)
9:15 AM	Welcome
9:20 AM	Panel 1 - Beyond the Battlefield: Air Power in COIN and Crisis Response (Chair: Dr Jeffrey McGovern) <u>Richard Newton</u> Beyond Theory: Air Power's Outsized Influence in Disaster Relief Operations <u>Stuart Hadaway</u> Minting the COIN: Royal Flying Corps Operations in Egypt, 1915 <u>Sebastian Ritchie</u> The Evolution of RAF Counterinsurgency Doctrine since the 1920s <u>Lee Ashcroft</u> "The Myth of the Benign Environment": How does the RAF use History to help with Today's Humanitarian Disaster Planning?
11:00 AM	Break (Teas, Coffees, and Pastries)
11:15 AM	Panel 2 – Policing from the Air: Empire, Coercion and Legitimacy (Chair: Dr Richard Newton) <u>Andrew Renwick</u> Air Policing in the Mandate <u>Alan Kearney</u> Air Power and the Consolidation of the Irish Free State, 1922-1923 <u>Christine Whittaker</u> "Humane" Bombing? RAF Air Control in Iraq, 1920-1925 <u>William Gillispie</u> Flying for Freedom: Black Aviators in the Ethiopian Military during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War (1935-1936)
1:00 PM	Lunch
2:00 PM	Panel 3 – From MANNA to Berlin: Airlift, Aid and Memory (Chair: Dr Sebastian Ritchie) <u>Alastair Noble</u> Deliverance for the Dutch: MANNA from Heaven, April-May 1945 <u>Ewan Burnet</u> Lifting above its weight? The RAF in the Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949 <u>Jeffrey McGovern</u> "Airlift – Berlin Mission": A Planning and Organisational Perspective on the US Air Force's Role in the 1948-1949 Berlin Airlift <u>Witali Gerber</u> Not just the "Candy Bomber": German Perspectives on the Berlin Airlift
3:40 PM	Break (Teas and Coffees)
4:00 PM	Panel 4 – From Liberation to Repatriation: The Human Dimensions of Air Power (Chair: Dr Peter Elliott) <u>Divya Sharma</u> When Planes Meant Hope or Fear: Air Power and Perception in the Partition of India [Virtual Paper] <u>Emily Walton</u> Opening the Cages: RAF Efforts in the Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees in the Far East <u>Lucia Wallbank</u> Air Transport Operations in the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees in the Far East <u>Owen Williams</u> Medical Lessons from the Second World War and their Applicability to Modern Conflict
5:30 PM	Wine Reception followed by a post-day one discussion at The Beaufort

Friday 11 September

Day 2	
9:00 AM	Late Registration (Teas and Coffees)
9:15 AM	Welcome
9:20 AM	Panel 5 – Air Power in the Age of Decolonisation (Chair: Dr Emma Mahoney) <u>Daniel Lee</u> Voices from Above: Aerial Psychological Warfare in Malaya and Kenya, 1948-1960 <u>Andrew Knapp</u> Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: France's Air Forces in Algeria, 1954-1962 <u>John Greenacre</u> Ops Normal: The Development of British Army Aviation through Counterinsurgency Operations, 1957-1967 <u>Ryan Ellis</u> Dissonant Afterlives of Cold War Wards: The Case of RAF Hospital Changi
11:00 AM	Break (Teas, Coffees, and Pastries)
11:15 AM	Panel 6 – From Counterinsurgency to Escalation: Air Power in the Cold War Era (Chair: Dr Maria Burczynska) <u>Carlos Mouta Raposo</u> The Portuguese Air Force in the Colonial War, 1961-1974 <u>Tom Dolan</u> From Counterinsurgency to Rolling Thunder: US Air Power in South East Asia, 1961-1963 <u>Matti Tokola</u> Air Power without War: Readiness, Threat and Experience in Cold War Sweden <u>Jennifer Howe</u> Bombing and Khmer Rouge Recruitment: New Interview Evidence
1:00 PM	Lunch
2:00 PM	RAFM 2025 Academic Awards Presentation
2:15 PM	Keynote (Chair: Seb Cox OBE) <u>Edward Burke</u> The RAF and Counter-Insurgency in South Arabia and Oman in the 1950s: Venoms, Levies and the Special Air Service
3:15 PM	Break (Teas and Coffees)
3:30 PM	Panel 7 – Air Power in Contemporary Counterinsurgency and Crisis Response (Chair: Dr Andrew Duncan) <u>Samuel Oyewole</u> Beyond Bombing and Killing: African Air Power in Humanitarian and Disaster Management Missions [Virtual Paper] <u>Neil Chamberlain</u> Operation OVERSTOCK: RAF Puma Assistance to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, August-September 1988 <u>Nina Hadaway</u> From here to Timbuktu: Counterinsurgency and Humanitarian Support in Mali
5:00 PM	Closing Remarks
5:10 PM	Finish

Conference Registration and Details

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 10 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 10 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. 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 Wang; she is part of the Archives, Library, and Research Department (Email ResearchNews@rafmuseum.org).

Keynote Speaker: Dr Edward Burke

Biography

Dr Edward Burke is an Assistant Professor in the History of War since 1945 at University College Dublin where he lectures and researches issues relating to military history, strategic studies, insurgency and terrorism. Prior to joining UCD, he was an Associate Professor in International Relations at the University of Nottingham from 2017-2022. From 2015 to 2017 Edward was a Lecturer in Strategic Studies at the University of Portsmouth, attached to the Royal Air Force College Cranwell. He is the author of three monographs including on the British Army (Liverpool, 2018) and loyalist paramilitarism in Ulster (Cambridge, 2024). Among his recent publications is a chapter (co-authored with Huw Bennett) entitled 'The Aden Protectorate Levies, Counter-Insurgency, and the Loyalist Bargain in South Arabia, 1951–1957', published in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Colonial Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (Oxford, 2023).

Title: The RAF and Counter-Insurgency in South Arabia and Oman in the 1950s: Venoms, Levies and the Special Air Service

Abstract

In the 1950s, the Air Ministry and the Royal Air Force had the lead responsibility for defence policy and military operations in much of the Arabian Peninsula. Consequently, the Air Officer Commanding in Aden had a broad range of forces under his command, including locally recruited levies. Military commanders in South Arabia and Oman also came to rely upon Special Forces to conduct counter-insurgency operations, especially in the Jebel Akhdar region of Oman. As the direction and conduct of operations became increasingly complex, Air Ministry senior officials took a distinctive, somewhat isolated, position on the future direction of British defence policy in the region. However, the British Army and the Colonial Office proved more effective in shifting policy in London towards a more offensive, army-led 'forward policy' in the Protectorates, while the Special Air Service also claimed considerable credit for the suppression of the Jebel Akhdar insurgency in 1958 (selectively leaked reports to the press bolstered the regiment's reputation and guaranteed its future). Inter-service tensions had significant strategic and operational consequences for the British presence (and wider relations) in the Arabian Peninsula.

Panel 1 – Beyond the Battlefield: Air Power in COIN and Crisis Response**Richard Newton****Biography**

Dr Richard Newton currently serves as the Director of the Air & Space Power team at the Irregular Warfare Initiative. He is a retired USAF lieutenant colonel who served as a combat rescue helicopter pilot, combat aviation advisor, strategic planner, and educator. Rick is a graduate of the USAF Academy, the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies, and holds a PhD in Defence Studies from King's College London. Rick is the author of *The RAF and Tribal Control: Airpower and Irregular Warfare Between the World Wars* (2019) and publishes regularly on Air Power, special operations, and irregular warfare. His work has been featured in *RAF Air & Space Power Review*, *USAF Air & Space Operations Journal*, *Small Wars Journal*, *Air Commando Journal*, and *Interpopulum: The Journal of Irregular Warfare and Special Operations*.

Title: Beyond Theory: Air Power's Outsized Influence in Disaster Relief Operations**Abstract**

At its core, Air Power is about influencing others. The earliest Air Power theorists, e.g., Douhet, Trenchard, and Mitchell, saw the potential of the air arm to wield powerful influencing effects, during the infancy of Air Power via the fear caused by actual or the threat of bombing. Air mobility, the ability to effectively transport people and cargo by air, came of age between the World Wars. Then the fledgling RAF learned Air Power's ability to deliver aid, supplies, and services achieved positive results in its imperial possessions where the "firm hand" of kinetic effects often created resentment.

In September 1919, in what is generally considered the first instance of Air Power used for disaster relief, the US Army Air Service dropped food and medical supplies to victims stranded by flooding along the Texas-Mexico border. While not a huge airlift effort, given the relatively primitive character of aircraft then, this operation demonstrated what was possible. By the 1930s, RAF thinking about air control had evolved to favour non-kinetic means in culturally and ideologically motivated conflicts. 1948's Berlin Airlift demonstrated the power of airlift to achieve strategic results without dropping a single bomb, something early air power theorists could not imagine. During the ensuing decades, as aircraft technology increased range, lift capacity, and delivery options, Air Power has proven time and again to be a powerful instrument of peaceful influence.

Credible research following disaster relief efforts in Indonesia (2004), Pakistan (2005), Syria-Turkey (2023), and elsewhere offers evidence that delivering and sustaining massive quantities of aid and disaster relief teams by air has had a generally positive impact on local perceptions and created feelings of goodwill towards the West. This lecture will show the evolution of Air Power as a force for positive influence, especially in those instances where Western nations were engaged in population-centric conflicts and "hearts and minds" were the key to winning.

Stuart Hadaway**Biography**

Stuart Hadaway is one of the Historians at the Air Historical Branch (RAF), where he has worked since 2009. He has written and spoken widely on the First World War in the Middle East and the air war. He is an Associate Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and a member of the committee of the Royal Air Force Historical Society.

Title: Minting the COIN: Royal Flying Corps Operations in Egypt, 1915

Abstract

In the summer of 1914, the Royal Flying Corps made its first operational deployment, to France. They operated in an industrialised nation able to provide technical support, in a familiar climate and environment, and against a conventional enemy force. When a detachment was sent to Egypt in November 1914, they would become the RFC's first true 'out of area' deployment. Not only would they struggle with a completely unfamiliar environment and climate, they would be operating at the end of stretched logistical lines, and fighting against an enemy which seldom operated as a formed body.

Although perhaps not a traditional counter-insurgency operation, through 1915 and into 1916 the British would face small units infiltrating into both the Western and Sinai Deserts, sometimes with the support of the local population, and with the intent of overthrowing British control of the country. While the RFC in France would have to learn how to spot for artillery and operate over fixed front lines, the Egypt Detachment RFC (and later Nos. 14 and 17 Squadrons) would face a far more fluid situation, and have to develop technics and tactics to provide a very different type of support to the ground forces.

This paper will examine how the RFC fulfilled this role, as well as the extent to which they drew on earlier European experiences in similar asymmetric campaigns before the war. France, Spain, and especially Italy had been closely scrutinized in their operations across Libya, Algeria, and Morocco, and the paper will also consider what, if any, lessons had been gleaned from those experiences.

Sebastian Ritchie**Biography**

Dr Sebastian Ritchie is head of the Air Historical Branch (RAF) of the Ministry of Defence. He obtained his PhD from King's College, London, in 1994 and lectured at the University of Manchester before joining the Air Historical Branch. He is the author of a number of official histories covering RAF operations in Iraq, the Former Yugoslavia, Libya and Afghanistan, and has also lectured and published widely on aspects of air power and air operations, as well as airborne operations, in the Second World War and post-war periods. His published books include *Industry and Air Power* (1997), *Arnhem: Myth and Reality* (2011), and *The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies* (two volumes, 2011), *The RAF and Airfield Air Defence since 1933* (2023), and multiple studies of RAF operations in the post-Cold War era.

Title: The Evolution of RAF Counterinsurgency Doctrine since the 1920s

Abstract

The RAF's role in counterinsurgency warfare extends back to the earliest years of its history. During the 1920s, the doctrine of air control emerged to provide a vital rationale for the RAF's survival as an independent service. Yet the concept has often been misunderstood and misrepresented; as a means of maintaining internal security, air control was exercised in many different ways across a wide variety of theatres. With the passage of time and the evolution of Air Power, RAF counterinsurgency doctrine inevitably changed, the inter-war language of air control making way for more recognisably modern air concepts, which were finally assembled into the 1961 publication – *Internal Security Air Operations*. However, withdrawal from empire had largely ended the RAF's counterinsurgency role by the 1970s, and doctrinal output became focused on conventional conflict within the NATO alliance. The end of the Cold War, the revival of national doctrine and the eruption of insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan then briefly led the RAF to reconsider the relationship between air power and counterinsurgency, but this revival of interest was to prove short-lived. This paper surveys the rise and decline of RAF counterinsurgency doctrine and its relationship with strategy and operations from the earliest operations in British Somaliland in 1920 through to the UK withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014.

Lee Ashcroft**Biography**

Squadron Leader Lee Ashcroft graduated from Cranwell following previous service in the Army Intelligence Corps. He joined the Logistics Branch, specialising in Air Movements. Notable highlights of his Service career include participating in operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Director logistics for US SF in Jordan. In his career, Ashcroft has received numerous laudatory awards: Joint Force Commanders Commendation (4* award) in 2017 for his contribution to operations in RAF Akrotiri, and a Chief of Air Staff (CAS) Commendation for his wider role to the organisation of the RAF100 celebrations in 2018. He also earned his green beret in 2010 as a commando.

Academic credentials include International Politics & Strategic Studies from Aberystwyth Uni; MA in Air Power in the Modern World (2017) with KCL, and finally an MSc in Logistics and Management (with distinction) at Lincoln University. With this distinction, he won the CIPs award for the highest dissertation mark in the academic year, also becoming a Fujitsu logistics essay prize winner. In 2019 Ashcroft was invited to speak as part of the RAF Museum Lecture Programme Selected for a CAS Trenchard Fellowship in 2022, In addition to this, Ashcroft has had several book reviews published in the *Air Power Review* in 2017 and 2024.

Title: "The Myth of the Benign Environment": How does the RAF use History to help with Today's Humanitarian Disaster Planning?

Abstract

The task is to get scholarship into the RAF operating environment; to reclaim the historical context, by evaluating case studies offering a redefinition of Air Power through objective empiricism and challenging fallacious facts. Following 9/11 defence focus on Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria commitments has enabled the RAF to prosecute operations in environments with absolute air supremacy. A complacency engendered in policymakers a false sense of security in its interpretation of the operating environment. The latest strategy arguably strengthens a western liberal interpretation of what 'good' looks like in terms of soft power across the globe overseeing commonwealth countries. However, a 'force for good' concept becomes challenged if disaster planning and HADR withdrawal becomes chaotic to wider conflict: Safe security conditions to all disaster planning is critical. In a fluid and varying

environment such that we find in the middle east crisis with Iran (e.g. 12 day war), with the addition of a natural disaster threat is highly likely to compound the problem through ambiguous narrative of what scholars interpreted as benign.

UK commitment to national security has largely been restricted to colonial policy, non-benign environments and NEOs of humanitarian disasters. And, reinforced by the IR defence review narrative on overseas territories. Recent crisis events reflects jittery policy makers avoiding intervention in deteriorating, or non-benign security crises. Perceived benign environments also cross critical boundaries of countries and the lines drawn by hand that divide one nation to the other subsequently affected by climate change (CC). Resilience to climate change is likely to become a key focus area for the MOD and, will continue to affect a range of UK defence activities to 2035 and beyond.

Panel 2 – Policing from the Air: Empire, Coercion and Legitimacy**Andrew Renwick****Biography**

After graduation from Durham University, Andrew Renwick 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. In 1985 he joined the staff of the RAF Museum in London.

After working in the Library, he 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. He 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.

He 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 he is the author of *RAF Hendon; Birthplace of Aerial Power*.

Title: Air Policing in the Mandate

Abstract

RAF air operations in Arabia and the Levant in the 1920s and 1930s are generally referred to under the heading of RAF policing. There was a greater variety of operations undertaken, however, than that title implies; this paper will look at these in more detail.

RAF policing in Iraq was generally restricted to Kurdistan. These were operations of last resort, undertaken once political efforts had failed. They had started, however, as counter-insurgency operations, aimed at preventing a Turkish invasion. It can be argued that operations against Sheikh Mahmud could also be considered counterinsurgency, which will be discussed in more detail.

The RAF visited Kuwait in 1920, demonstrating the new force in the region, effectively a 'hearts and minds' operation. The incursions of Ikhwan tribes from Nejd into Iraq and Kuwait in the 1920s resulted in air operations against their forces until the capture of their leader, Faisal-al-Dawish.

There was the fear that Arab tribes would seek to cross Jordan and attack Jewish settlements in Palestine. An incursion by Wahabi forces into Jordan in the 1920s resulted in combined operations by RAF aircraft, armoured cars and Jordanian ground troops. The situation was far more complicated, however, with Jewish settlers adding to internal tensions. It was a situation which revealed that air power alone was not always the answer.

The imposition of western values and fixed national boundaries on the nomadic Bedouin tribes was part of the problem faced by British forces. The use of Air Power, however, with the speed at which it could react and the distances it could cover, reduced conflict in the region, until changes occurred in the politics of the region, the result of the Second World War.

Alan Kearney**Biography**

Alan Kearney holds an MA in Military History and Strategic Studies from Maynooth University, where he was awarded a Hume Scholarship. He is a retired Commandant of the Irish Defence Forces with almost four decades of service, including overseas deployments with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and NATO-led operations in Afghanistan (ISAF).

During his military career he contributed to Defence Forces historical research initiatives examining contested events in Irish military history using modern analytical and simulation-based approaches. This included work reassessing aspects of the Battle of Mount Street Bridge during the 1916 Easter Rising.

Alan currently works in the European defence industry and writes on defence policy, military capability development, and security affairs. His commentary has appeared in outlets including the Irish Examiner, the Modern War Institute at West Point, and NATO Review. His research interests include the development of military institutions in newly formed states and the early adoption of emerging technologies during periods of state formation. His interest in the history of air power is also informed by family connections to the Royal Air Force; his father served in the RAF in the late 1960s, including operational service in Oman.

Title: Air Power and the Consolidation of the Irish Free State, 1922-1923

Abstract

The role of Air Power in counterinsurgency is often examined through imperial campaigns in the Middle East and Africa. Far less attention has been given to the emergence of aviation in the internal conflicts accompanying the formation of new states in Europe. The Irish Civil War (1922–1923) provides a revealing example of how air assets were rapidly incorporated into the struggle to establish governmental authority.

Following the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the newly formed Irish Free State faced armed opposition from anti-Treaty forces across large areas of the country. Seeking to extend its reach beyond the limits of its ground forces, the Provisional Government established an Air Service within weeks of the conflict's outbreak, equipped with aircraft supplied by Britain. Aircraft were tasked with reconnaissance over insurgent-held areas and used to facilitate communication between dispersed units. While the tactical success of these sorties remained inconsistent, and the extent of offensive bombing remains a subject of historical debate, the very employment of such assets played a significant role in the conflict's psychological landscape.

This paper argues that the Free State's early use of air assets was less about achieving decisive tactical destruction than about projecting authority in a contested environment. Aircraft provided surveillance, mobility, and psychological impact, reinforcing the image of a technologically capable government able to operate across the emerging battlespace. By examining aircraft procurement, operational employment, and contemporary perceptions of aerial activity—including how these operations were contested by anti-Treaty forces—the paper situates the Irish Civil War within the broader history of Air Power and counterinsurgency.

The Irish case demonstrates how even limited aviation capabilities could shape the dynamics of internal conflict and contribute to the consolidation of political legitimacy during a fragile period of state formation.

Christine Whittaker**Biography**

Christine Whittaker is a postgraduate (MA) student of Military History at the University of Wolverhampton. Her research interests focus upon Air Power, coercion, and the relationship between military operations and political outcomes, with particular emphasis upon the theoretical and historical dimensions of aerial warfare. Her current work engages with debates surrounding coercion theory and the use of Air Power in both strategic and counterinsurgency contexts.

She developed an early interest in Air Power through time spent as a child at Maxwell Air Force Base, a centre of U.S. Air Power thought, which continues to inform her academic interests.

Title: "Humane" Bombing? RAF Air Control in Iraq, 1920-1925

Abstract

This paper examines the RAF's use of "air control" in Iraq following the 1920 Iraqi revolt, focusing upon its presentation as a humane, efficient method of imperial policing. British policymakers employed Air Power as a viable means of maintaining control in this case, given the political and financial constraints involved in large-scale occupation. Advocates of air control, led by Hugh Trenchard, stressed the policy's precision and deterrence merits, framing it as a restrained approach to warfare. Whilst historians such as David Omissi have detailed air control's economic and administrative logic, others such as Priya Satia have emphasized its imperial and coercive elements.

This paper develops this discourse by exploring the extent to which deployment of air control in Iraq realised the claims of precision and restraint. It suggests that RAF operations in Iraq could involve coercive "punishment" bombing including attacks on civilian infrastructure, this raising questions about the distinction between civilian and military objectives.

Situating air control within broader counterinsurgency debates, this paper argues that the perceived "humaneness" of air control deployed in Iraq 1920-25 functioned to legitimize the use of force in an imperial context whilst reducing its political visibility. Air control here actually served as a reconfiguration of earlier forms of imperial coercion, enabling Britain to power project at a distance through the language of restraint.

By examining the discord between rhetoric and practice, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions around the challenges of counterinsurgency operations applying the concepts of precision and restraint.

William Gillispie**Biography**

William Gillispie is currently a doctoral student in the History Department at Rice University in Houston, TX. He studies African American experiences in the First World War and the Interwar period, including their early attempts to become aviators. His dissertation is currently titled "Black Americans in the Wilsonian Moment: African American Internationalization from World War One to the Invasion of Ethiopia 1917-1935."

He earned a BA and MA in History at Tulane University in New Orleans, LA. His current research 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 the 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, then World History, AP Psychology and AP Economics at Willow Charter School in New Orleans.

Title: Air Warfare as a Humanitarian Service by Black Aviators in Africa: Volunteering in the Ethiopian Air Force during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War

Abstract

In 1935, as Italy began building up forces on the borders of Ethiopia in preparation for an invasion, African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans leaders put out a call for volunteers. Internationalised by their experiences in the First World War and the postwar organisations such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association, black veterans and aviators began to gather in New York, Chicago, Detroit and Philadelphia to form regiments and units to support Ethiopia's forces. This mobilisation only accelerated once the invasion began, though the US State Department and British Colonial Office prevented almost all from going. Despite this, two black aviators were able to serve, Trinidad-born Hubert Julian and Mississippian John C. Robinson. Both were early interwar era aviators and went on diverse journeys to become pilots, and, in October 1935, when Italian forces crossed into the country, they were ready to fly for the Ethiopian Airforce.

The story of Julian and Robinson in the Ethiopian Airforce during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War (1935-1936) tells is more than just the story of two black aviators or even that of Ethiopian resistance during the conflict. What their experience reveals is broader international connections between the US, the Caribbean, Africa and European Imperialism. Black Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in 1935 took the opportunity to fight for only one of two independent states in Africa against the racist world order created by the victorious allies in the First World War. Julian and Robinson were the only known aviators to have made it over to Ethiopia, but they were examples of a broader movement concerned for the fate of Africa and seeing this battle against one European colonial power as part of the broader struggle against imperialism and white supremacy. Thus, in this paper, I will consider Julian and Robinson's experiences in the Ethiopian Airforce through the lens of what they understand as a humanitarian military service and in the broader context the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, European Imperialism and the post-First World War international order to demonstrate the wider significance of their service as a sort of "insurgency" by black Americans and Afro-Caribbeans against imperialism and white supremacy.

Panel 3 – From MANNA to Berlin: Airlift, Aid and Memory**Alastair Noble****Biography**

Dr Alastair Noble is Deputy Head of the Air Historical Branch (RAF) and author of numerous volumes considering Defence Policy and the RAF since 1970. Previously he was a Senior Lecturer in Defence and International Affairs at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Ministerial Speechwriter and Senior Policy Officer in the Scotland Office. He was also Senior Researcher in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Historians team. His monograph *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany 1944-45* followed his University of Leeds PhD. He has written books, articles and contributions to edited volumes on modern political, military and diplomatic history.

Title: Deliverance for the Dutch: MANNA from Heaven, April-May 1945

Abstract

Operation MANNA is deserving of greater scholarly attention. Most accounts of the RAF over Europe during 1945 focus on the devastating late-war Bomber Command operations against German towns and cities. It makes for grim reading. However, it was not always about destruction. MANNA, the dropping of supplies to the starving population of German-occupied Holland in late April and early May 1945, is a case in point. This was a real relief operation which saved thousands of Dutch lives and entered into the annals of history.

This contribution will consider the drivers for MANNA. Using contemporary documentation, it will go on to describe the arrangements and organisation which made such an extraordinary effort possible. This highlights the barriers to be overcome to provide salvation for the starving. At the heart of the discussion are the RAF squadrons and units responsible for gathering and dispensing this immense aid effort. Alongside this, is an assessment of the impact of MANNA on squadron morale as the European war neared a victorious conclusion. This was a very different kind of operation for the aircrew of Bomber Command, albeit with its own set of risks and dangers.

This was not the first time and most certainly not the last occasion where the RAF delivered vital humanitarian aid. Indeed, this last year we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the RAF relief effort in Ethiopia in 1985, Operation BUSHEL. However, the special circumstances of MANNA, the successful provision of mass humanitarian relief in the midst of a total war, render it worthy of inclusion in any examination of the RAF at the end of the European war.

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.

Title: Lifting above its weight? The RAF in the Berlin Airlift 1948-1949

Abstract

With the end of the Second World War, Germany was divided into four zones of occupation, administered by France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. Berlin was divided into four zones in the same way, but the city itself lay deep in the Soviet zone of Germany. This left the western zones of Berlin, and the overland transport routes to the west of Germany, potentially vulnerable to Soviet encroachment and interference. In June 1948 Soviet forces blockaded the land routes from west Germany to west Berlin, with the intention of forcing the western powers to abandon their zones of the city.

With evacuation of Berlin ruled out by the British and US governments, it was quickly decided to keep the city supplied by air. At this time RAF Transport Command was flying regularly around the world, maintaining connections with British forces in many locations. Transport crews were experienced in navigation, flying in all weather conditions and, following the Second World War, the RAF was also very accustomed to working with and alongside US forces.

The number and capacity of transport aircraft available to the RAF was, however, an issue. In a British cabinet meeting of 28 June 1948, it was stated that the RAF could fly an increasing daily load of supplies into Berlin up to 750 tons on 3 July, but that this could only be maintained for a month. But by the time of the last RAF flight of the airlift, over a year later on 6 October 1949, the RAF had flown 394,509 tons of supplies into Berlin. This paper will examine the speed and effectiveness of the RAF's initial response to the Soviet blockade of Berlin, and how the RAF's transport fleet was able to exceed initial expectations to such an extent.

Jeffrey McGovern
Biography

Jeffrey T. McGovern, PhD, is a U.S. Air Force historian stationed at RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk, England. His Air Force career as a civil servant began in 2013 and his current assignment is his second tour in Europe. He has served with tactical and theatre level Air Force organisations. Prior to his Air Force career, he served as a soldier in the U.S. Army for eight years, in a variety of infantry units, including four years with the 82d Airborne Division. He writes a blog, "wwiitroopcarrier.org," that broadly covers US airborne operations in the Second World War and he has appeared as a guest speaker a few times on the YouTube channel "WW2TV." He also has experience leading more than 100 battle staff rides for the U.S. military across western and central Europe that focused on twentieth century conflicts. The combination of above experiences has led him to focus on the joint and combined planning aspects of operations, an oft neglected aspect in the historiography of Air Power.

Title: "Airlift – Berlin Mission": Planning and Organisational Perspective on the US Air Force's Role in the 1948-1949 Berlin Airlift

Abstract

As with most major historical events, what is largely remembered in popular memory is the outcome of the event; a few snappy concluding sentences that collapse many components and complex relationships into a simple process; and/or that the outcome (success or failure) was predetermined from the start. The discussion around the 1948-1949 Berlin Airlift and the U.S. Air Force's role in its execution is certainly not immune from one or more of these perspectives and within Air Power history circles, I argue that it epitomises all three. The Berlin Airlift has taken on a mythical status, one that masks the complexity and incredibly detailed planning work and the never-ending day-to-day work of its participants.

The operational and tactical achievements of the U.S. Air Force, the Royal Air Force, the mobilised German citizenry, and to a lesser extent the French Air Force in the execution of the Berlin Airlift are undeniably incredible, but they should also equally be seen as undeniably unexpected. At the start of the "Little Lift" in April 1948 and certainly at the start of the larger airlift in June 1948, the U.S. government, the U.S. Air Force, and the Soviet Union did not believe that the Western Allies could supply the Berlin missions beyond several weeks and most certainly they did not believe the Allies could also concurrently supply the German civilian industry and population of three Western sectors.

This paper details the operational and tactical hurdles that U.S. Air Forces in Europe had to cross, some successfully and some not that made the Airlift work. These efforts, largely forgotten in the present, make eight decades later the execution of the Berlin Airlift seem matter of fact and an inevitable success from its start. A perspective that is far from the understanding of Airmen in early 1948.

Witali Gerber**Biography**

Witali Gerber is the Military Historian and Curator for War, Conflict & Youth Culture at the Bundeswehr Military History Museum. In addition, Witali serves as Vice-President of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Arms and Military History (ICOM), where he oversees the committee's publications and its international cooperation with non-European regions.

He was the curator of the museum's first international digital exhibition, "Berlin Airlift Remembered", produced in close collaboration with the Royal Air Force Museum London, the National Museum of the United States Air Force, and the Allied Museum Berlin. His academic background in Military Studies at the University of Potsdam, informs his work across the fields of conflict studies, contemporary history, and military ethics.

Witali's research and curatorial practice have contributed to scholarly and public engagement with the cultural history of the Luftwaffe and its entanglement with youth imaginaries in modern Germany, notably through the project "Youth(-culture) and the Luftwaffe". He has presented his research at numerous international academic and museological institutions, including King's College London, Aarhus University, the Royal Historical Society, the Canada Aviation and Space Museum, the Royal Air Force Museum, the National Archives (UK), the Royal Armouries, Sciences Po, as well as within the professional networks of ICOM.

Title: Not just the "Candy Bomber": German Perspectives on the Berlin Airlift

Abstract

The Berlin Airlift of 1948–49 is commonly remembered as one of the largest and most complex humanitarian air operations in modern history. It has also become one of the most frequently narrated episodes of the early Cold War, often framed through logistical achievement, Allied resolve, and the iconic figure of the “Candy Bomber.” Yet this dominant historiography has tended to privilege a limited set of easily communicable themes: tonnage figures, flight hours, technological performance, and other spectacular episodes of aerial relief. It has also remained largely centred on the principal Allied actors.

This paper reconsiders the Berlin Airlift from a German perspective, focusing on the expectations, perceptions, and emotional worlds of civilians in both West and East Berlin. Rather than retelling a familiar story of Cold War confrontation, it asks how this vast military-humanitarian operation was experienced from below: by adults, young people, and children who lived beneath the air corridors, heard the aircraft overhead, and interpreted their meaning within rapidly diverging political and social environments. How did West Berliners understand the Airlift as a promise of survival and protection? How did observers in East Berlin and the Soviet occupation zone perceive, contest, or reinterpret the same spectacle?

Drawing on underused sources, including school magazines and publications produced by East German trade unions and affiliated institutions, the paper expands the analytical frame beyond strategy, logistics, and heroism. It argues that the Berlin Airlift was not merely a technical triumph or diplomatic confrontation, but an emotionally charged encounter between air power, humanitarianism, occupation, and legitimacy. Seventy-seven years later, this perspective allows us to reassess the Airlift as a lived experience of defeated Germans and as a historical case through which to reflect on the political meanings of humanitarian air operations today.

Panel 4 - From Liberation to Repatriation: The Human Dimensions of Air Power**Divya Sharma****Biography**

Divya Sharma holds an MSc in Contemporary History from the University of Edinburgh and a BA (Hons) in History from the University of Delhi. Her research focuses on modern South Asia, with particular emphasis on the lived experiences of political upheaval, state authority, and memory.

She is especially interested in how ordinary people interpret and respond to moments of crisis, and how such perceptions shape broader understandings of power, legitimacy, and governance. Her work engages with questions central to the study of "hearts and minds," examining how authority is communicated, perceived, and contested in conditions of uncertainty.

She has held research positions with the Archaeological Survey of India and the Asiatic Society of Social Science and Research and was a Millennium Fellow under the United Nations Academic Impact, where she worked on initiatives to expand access to education. Following her graduation, she is currently interning at a girls' college in rural Rajasthan, India.

At the University of Edinburgh Students' Union, she served as an elected Postgraduate Taught Representative, representing over 14,000 international students, and was also elected within the History Society. She has been actively involved in initiatives focused on women's upliftment.

Her broader research seeks to bridge political history with social and cultural perspectives, with a particular interest in how power operates through both coercion and perception. She aspires to contribute to public life in India through engagement with democratic institutions and policymaking, bringing historically grounded perspectives to questions of governance and social change.

Title: When Planes Meant Hope or Fear: Air Power and Perception in the Partition of India

Abstract

In 1947, the sight of aircraft in the skies of North India could signal very different possibilities: rescue, authority, or imminent danger. This paper explores how Air Power was experienced and interpreted by civilian populations during the upheaval of the Partition of India.

While aircraft were used for reconnaissance, transport, and limited relief operations, their presence carried meanings that extended far beyond their immediate function. Drawing on archival records, alongside oral histories and contemporary accounts, the paper examines how communities responded to the sight and sound of planes in moments of uncertainty and crisis. For some, aircraft suggested safety or the possibility of escape; for others, they signalled fear, rumour, and the unknown. In many cases, their appearance sparked narratives that shaped how people understood rapidly changing political realities.

Building on Derek Gregory's work on the spatial and psychological dimensions of modern warfare, and Gyanendra Pandey's emphasis on lived experience and memory in Partition, this paper shifts attention from strategy to perception. It argues that air power operates not only through what it does, but through what people believe it can do. Even without sustained aerial campaigns, the visibility of aircraft influenced how authority, protection, and control were imagined on the ground. Situating Partition within broader discussions of "hearts and minds," the paper suggests that airspace functioned as both a physical and psychological arena.

It highlights how governing from above depends not only on force or technology, but on trust, uncertainty, and the fragile ways in which people make sense of power in moments of crisis.

Emily Walton

Biography

After graduating from Kings College, London, Emily now works at the Air Historical Branch (RAF) as the Senior 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 (old RAF Woodhall Spa).

Title: Opening the Cages: RAF Efforts in the Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees in the Far East

Abstract

In August 1945, Japan's surrender brought to an end six years of bloody combat but marked the start of one of the most challenging logistic operations of the war. Having not ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention, Japan had not kept the Allies as informed about prisoners of war in the same manner as Nazi Germany and therefore the Allies faced many challenges in trying to trace and repatriate them. It was estimated that there were 70,000 prisoners in around 227 camps across an area of some one and a half million square miles, but all of this was still just an estimate. There were added complications too, not least the terrain and volatile political situation across the area of operations.

The RAF participated in two operations designed to locate Allied Prisoners of Wars and Internees (APWI), Operations Birdcage and Mastiff. In four days, aircraft made leaflet drops over 236 locations and 90 known camps in Burma, Siam, French Indo-China, Malaya and Sumatra. But locating and informing APWI that the war was over was only the start, the repatriation efforts would take a combined Allied effort and at times would stretch diplomatic efforts. The hardships APWIs faced were only to become fully apparent once the rescue operations were underway and the estimated numbers of APWIs proved to be wildly off.

Despite the immense effort, the operations in the Far East to repatriate and provide aid to Allied prisoners, have been largely overlooked and overshadowed by the European conflict. But in many ways, Birdcage and Mastiff were more complicated politically, emotionally and logistically. This paper will examine the issues involved in this important humanitarian effort and highlight its place in the RAF's history.

Lucia Wallbank**Biography**

Lucia Wallbank is the Archivist at the RAF Museum. Lucia has an MA (Hons) in Modern History from the University of St Andrews, and a postgraduate certificate from the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies at the University of Strathclyde. She has recently achieved her MLitt in Archives and Records Management via the University of Dundee, writing her dissertation on Air Ministry recordkeeping. She has been at the RAF Museum since 2018, starting as an Assistant Curator for the Archive and Library before moving into her current role. Previously, she worked at the Montrose Air Station Heritage Centre and Arbroath Signal Tower Museum. She has appeared in a number of documentaries, with her most recently featuring in *WW2: Women on the Front Line* (Channel 4).

Title: The Role of Air Transport in the Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees in the Far East

Abstract

On 6 August 1945, the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan, led to an abrupt to war in the Far East. The urgent task of planning the repatriation of prisoners of war and civilian internees from across the vast South-East Asia Command area then began in earnest. Led by the inter-service and multinational Co-ordination Committee at Kandy, RAPWI (Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees) had enabled the evacuation of over 96,000 people by May 1946.

From 28 August 1945 ('S' Day) onwards, RAF squadrons were redeployed for leaflet drops bringing news of victory to isolated prisoners-of-war (Op Birdcage); and delivering much-needed stores and medical relief teams to the camps (Op Mastiff). The strategic and tactical air transport component was critical to achieving RAPWI's objectives. Tactical air transport, then a relatively new type of operation, fulfilled these requirements under logistical pressures, notably a shortage of aircraft and spares. Meanwhile, as well as the mental strain, crews contended with the challenges of carrying out operations while navigating through dense rugged terrain and torrid weather conditions.

The humanitarian triumph of the "greatest mercy mission of the war" cannot be understated. Yet even with the operations' relative complexity and scale, the RAF contribution to RAPWI has received only limited scholarly attention when compared to its achievements in Europe. It is a forgotten aspect of a forgotten war.

This paper examines the role played by air transport operations in RAPWI. It draws on Air Ministry records and original papers from the RAF Museum Archives to explore both their operational execution and the lived experiences of the aircrews who flew them.

Owen Williams**Biography**

Wing Commander Owen Williams is a Royal Air Force Medical Officer, specialising as a Consultant in Emergency Medicine at Joint Hospital Group (North). He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, has completed an Academic Clinical Fellowship and holds Postgraduate Certificates in Clinical Research and Medical Education. As an Honorary Lecturer in the Academic Department of Military Emergency Medicine, his research interests are in patient evacuation, specifically the use of uncrewed systems to facilitate this, and prolonged fieldcare. He particularly enjoys translational research, to enable research concepts and findings to be applied directly to Defence and RAF Medical Services' practice.

Title: Medical Lessons from the Second World War and their Applicability to Modern Conflict

Abstract

The large-scale combat operations (LSCO) undertaken by British Armed forces during the Second World War fundamentally transformed the Royal Air Force Medical Services (RAFMS). Utilising organisational learning, the RAFMS developed a comprehensive and agile Operational Patient Care Pathway, from point of injury through to rehabilitation and return to duty. This study identifies and collates the lessons from the Second World War that are most relevant to future LSCO, presenting potential challenges, solutions and applications to these for the modern RAFMS.

Four independent reviewers analysed the contents of the post-war RAFMS summary "History of the Second World War United Kingdom Medical Series: The Royal Air Force Medical Services". Key challenges to the RAFMS, relating to the organisation of the Medical Evacuation System and RAF Mobile Field Hospitals, and adaptive solutions to overcome these, were identified and codified. The key lessons identified were: Establishing Aeromedical Evacuation infrastructure for LSCO; Developing and maintaining suitably-qualified-and experienced medical personnel; Providing safe, appropriate, mobile and scalable facilities for Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs) to function; Meeting the Operational demands of mobile warfare; Safe, ordered and tracked patient flow through MTFs; and Interoperability.

The last conflict which required RAFMS support for LSCO was the Second World War, but the lessons identified are highly relevant to today's RAFMS. These lessons regarding the challenges faced by the AE system and working processes of deployed MTFs, and subsequent adaptations to overcome these, should be further analysed and applied to the RAFMS by the formation of a task-and-finish working group.

Panel 5 – Air Power in the Age of Decolonisation

Daniel Lee

Biography

Daniel Lee read History at the University of Bristol (BA, 2018), where his undergraduate dissertation examined the RAF's psychological warfare campaign in the Malayan Emergency, drawing on declassified Psychological Warfare Interrogation Centre data and RAF operational reports. He subsequently took an MPhil in Modern British History at Queens' College, Cambridge (2018–19), extending this work into a comparative study of information management in the Malayan and Kenyan Emergencies, with a particular focus on the role of aerial psychological warfare in both campaigns.

He first encountered the RAF Museum's archives during a work experience placement at Hendon in summer 2015, which shaped the direction of his subsequent research.

After Cambridge, he qualified as a solicitor and trained at Slaughter and May before moving into the technology sector. He is currently co-founder of a startup building AI tools for the legal profession, and continues to engage with twentieth-century British counterinsurgency history in an independent capacity.

Title: Voices from Above: Aerial Psychological Warfare in Malaya and Kenya, 1948-1960

Abstract

The historiography of British counterinsurgency in the Malayan and Kenyan Emergencies has been dominated by two preoccupations: the 'hearts and minds' policy and its political architects, and, more recently, the violence of detention, resettlement and interrogation. The Royal Air Force's contribution to both campaigns has been consistently downgraded - characterised as 'ancillary,' 'almost entirely unsuccessful,' or, at best, a delivery mechanism for propaganda designed elsewhere. I will argue that aerial psychological warfare, far from being marginal, functioned as the essential link between counterinsurgency policy and its intended audiences in both theatres, and that comparing the two campaigns reveals how the RAF developed a distinctive non-lethal doctrine over the course of the 1950s.

Drawing on Psychological Warfare Interrogation Centre data on Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEPs), RAF annual operational reports, captured Malayan National Liberation Army documents, Colonial Office files on Kenya, and the records of the Emergency Information Services, the paper traces the evolution of leaflet-dropping and Voice Aircraft operations from improvised experiments in 1948 to a codified doctrine by 1960. In Malaya, interrogation data shows that 96.5% of surrendered insurgents questioned in mid-1954 had read at least one RAF leaflet, and that a majority cited aerial psychological warfare as significant in their decision to surrender. In Kenya, broadly comparable techniques were deployed against Mau Mau forest gangs, but with sharply different assumptions about audience, race and legitimacy.

The comparison illuminates three things: the operational mechanics of aerial psychological warfare as a force multiplier alongside amnesty offers and resettlement; the racialised assumptions that shaped how each campaign was targeted and justified; and the doctrinal legacy, codified in Air Ministry Pamphlet 375 (1960), which embedded these lessons into RAF counterinsurgency thinking for the decades that followed.

Andrew Knapp**Biography**

Professor Andrew Knapp is Emeritus Professor of French Politics and Contemporary History at the University of Reading, UK. His publications include, as sole author, *Les Français sous les bombes alliées, 1940-1945* (Paris: Tallandier, 2014) and *Charles de Gaulle* (London: Routledge, 2020); as joint author (with Claudia Baldoli), *Forgotten Blitzes: France and Italy under Allied Air Attack* (London: Continuum, 2012); as joint editor (with Claudia Baldoli and Richard Overy), *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940-1945* (London: Continuum, 2011) and (with John Barzman and Corinne Bouillot), *Bombardements 1944: Le Havre, Normandie, France, Europe* (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2016). He is a member of the French Air and Space Academy and of the Conseil Scientifique of the Fondation Charles de Gaulle. He is currently preparing, under the auspices of the Fondation Charles de Gaulle and the French Service Historique de la Défense, an edited work on De Gaulle and Air Power.

Title: Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: France's Air Forces in Algeria, 1954-1962

Abstract

The Algerian War (1954-1962) remains a template for a large-scale counter-insurgency operation that went right militarily but wrong politically. It mobilised, at its peak, half a million French troops, including 56,000 airmen plus some 1,250 fixed-wing aircraft and 450 helicopters. Through transportation, logistics, interdiction, close ground support, reconnaissance, or evacuation of casualties, the French Air Force and Army Air Forces were the ground troops' indispensable force multipliers against Algeria's National Liberation Army (ALN). With an Air Force general, Maurice Challe, as overall Commander-in-Chief from 1958-1960, Army-Air Force co-operation was reinforced and air power used in ways that pointed forward to Vietnam: helicopters, especially, became mobile command posts, military transports, ambulances, and gunships. Challe transformed a war of position into a war of movement which the French won: by 1961 ALN strength within Algeria was down to just 5,000.

But the French lost the battle for hearts and minds, despite their best attempts at 'psychological warfare' aimed at isolating the ALN within its community and persuading Algerians of the merits of *Algérie française*. Air Force logistics contributed to what was primarily an Army effort, and aircraft were tasked with leafletting and equipped with loudspeakers. But their impact was minimal, and the Air Force developed no serious 'psychological warfare' doctrine. Its main 'psychological' role lay in intimidating ALN fighters and boosting the morale of French ground troops.

It was through other actions that France's armed forces lost the battle for hearts and minds. Ground troops routinely tortured 'suspects'. The Army Air Force threw victims out of helicopters. The Air Force destroyed villages with napalm and woodland with phosphorus bombs, and enforced free-fire zones from which some 2 million civilians were displaced. Though fast-learning and militarily effective, the French Air Force leadership proved blind to its own contribution to a decisive political defeat.

John Greenacre**Biography**

Dr John Greenacre was commissioned into the Royal Corps of Transport in 1988 before transferring to the Army Air Corps on completion of the Army Pilot's Course in 1995. He served on operations in the Gulf, Bosnia and Northern Ireland and also worked in Germany, Canada, Kenya and the Falkland Islands. He completed his PhD in History at the University of Leeds in 2009 before retiring from the Army in 2011. John has been a lecturer in history at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich since 2017. Among his other research interests, he has been examining the broad development of British Army aviation on behalf of the Army Air Corps. His latest book, *Ops Normal; The Authorised Operational History of the Army Air Corps, 1957-2017, Volume 1*, co-authored with fellow Army Air Corps veteran Mike Peters, was published by Helion in July 2024. The second and final volume is expected to be published in the autumn of 2026.

Title: Ops Normal: The Development of British Army Aviation through Counterinsurgency Operations, 1957-1967

Abstract

When the British Army Air Corps (AAC) was established on 1 September 1957 it immediately inherited aircraft and men supporting three ongoing operations: the Malayan Emergency, the Cyprus Emergency, and countering the IRA's Border Campaign in Northern Ireland. From its inception the AAC endeavoured to establish a central identity for British Army aviation, develop its organisations, procure new equipment and train its personnel, all while contributing to multiple counterinsurgency's, each with its own character and requirements.

The eruption of the Borneo Confrontation and the Aden Emergency in 1963 only exacerbated the situation and stretched the AAC still further. Nevertheless, nobody doubted the value of Army aviation in counterinsurgency operations. It was, however, that early success and recognition that threatened the fledgling Corps' very existence. To provide wider support to multiple, concurrent counterinsurgency operations across the world the Army trialled the Unit Light Aircraft concept and then introduced the Integrated Flight Scheme. Almost overnight infantry, cavalry and artillery units had their own organic aviation and the AAC was in danger of becoming redundant.

It was not until 1967 with the end of the Aden campaign, the demise of the Integrated Flight Scheme and developments in NATO and British defence policy that the AAC had an opportunity to develop as the British Army's central aviation provider. Despite the turbulence of its first decade, Army aviation and the AAC had quickly established an operational reputation as an effective and professional aviation arm, forged during counterinsurgency operations around the world.

This lecture examines that first decade of British Army aviation and its effectiveness during counterinsurgency operations from the jungles of Perak to the mountains of the Radfan.

Ryan Ellis
Biography

Ryan John Ellis is a WRoCAH-funded (AHRC) PhD researcher at the University of York, working with The Royal Air Force Museum on the heritage significance of former RAF Changi, Singapore.

Passionate about safeguarding and promoting Cold War heritage, Ryan currently serves as Vice Chair of The Cold War Network. It is responsible for organising National Cold War Heritage Week, supported by the National Lottery Community Fund. He is also a member of the Youth Advisory Board at the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

Previously, he captured more than 200 hours of oral history testimony as the Head of Storytelling at the Royal Signals Museum. In 2024, in recognition of this output, he featured on the inaugural BBC History Extra '30 under 30' list.

Title: Dissonant Afterlives of Cold War Wards: The Case of RAF Hospital Changi

Abstract

Constructed as part of Singapore's expanding RAF estate in the mid-twentieth century, RAF Hospital Changi began life in adapted Kitchener Barracks buildings dating from the pre-Second World War garrison. From medical evacuations during the Malayan Emergency to supporting UN 'flying ambulance' routes in the Korean War, the hospital's reach quickly extended far beyond Singapore. Its wards and theatres, therefore, formed part of a wider transnational infrastructure that underpinned Britain's Cold War presence in Southeast Asia.

Today, the ruins of 'Old Changi Hospital' exemplify a form of dissonant postcolonial heritage: a site whose meanings are contested and unevenly distributed across communities. While Commonwealth veterans and their families often remember the site as a place of care and professional expertise, not least due to the modern and well-equipped maternity facilities, local narratives tend to emphasise its later abandonment. Indeed, the site has contemporary associations with urban exploration and has been popularly reimagined as a 'haunted' space. These divergent memory practices reflect deeper tensions around how colonial and military histories are curated, sanitised, or strategically forgotten.

By foregrounding the hospital's Cold War medical function during periods of insurgency and regional unrest, this paper highlights the need for heritage approaches that acknowledge the transnational, multi-vocal, and often uncomfortable dimensions of RAF history in the region. 'Old Changi Hospital', far from being an anomalous ruin, offers a lens through which to rethink how Cold War military sites are interpreted within twenty-first century heritage practice - both in Singapore and across the wider Commonwealth.

Panel 6 – From Counterinsurgency to Escalation: Air Power in the Cold War Era**Carlos Mouta Raposo****Biography**

Colonel Carlos Mouta Raposo, joined the Air Force Academy in 1982, to become an officer and an aviator. Reclassified in a new career field in 1989 as Human Resources specialist, he was posted in different Portuguese Air Force Bases and military headquarters, and performed various functions in his area of expertise, and others such as Instructor, School Director, Public Affairs Officer, Air Force Deputy Spokesperson, Executive Officer, Air Force Academy teacher and Department Director, and International Guest Speaker at NATOSchool Oberammergau for 15 years. He is the Museu do Ar Director since December 2019.

Throughout his military career, he has attended several national and international courses, notably the Air Force Pedagogical Training Course for Trainers, the Computer Based Instruction Design & Development and the Academic Instructor Course, both in the United States of America, the NATO Public Information Officers Course, the NATO Academic Instructor Course and the NATO Senior Officer Strategic Communications Familiarisation Course, at NATOSchool Oberammergau, Germany. During his role as a director the Museu do Ar was distinguished with several awards from the Portuguese Museums Association.

Title: The Portuguese Air Force in the Colonial War, 1961-1974

Abstract

This paper examines the role of the Portuguese Air Force during the Colonial War (1961-1974), focusing on how air power was mobilized not only as a military instrument but also as a tool of political control, humanitarian projection, and counterinsurgency strategy. Operating across geographically and culturally diverse theatres in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, the Portuguese Air Force developed a distinctive model of air-ground integration that combined kinetic operations with efforts to influence local populations.

Air mobility enabled rapid troop deployment, medical evacuation, and logistical support to isolated garrisons, while also facilitating civic action programs, including the delivery of supplies and the evacuation of civilians. These activities formed part of a broader "hearts and minds" campaign aimed at undermining insurgent influence and reinforcing the legitimacy of Portuguese rule.

At the same time, air power played a critical role in surveillance, close air support, and psychological operations, often blurring the line between humanitarian assistance and military necessity. The paper interrogates this ambiguity, asking to what extent humanitarian practices were instrumentalized within a counterinsurgency framework and how they were perceived by local populations.

Portugal's ability to sustain a long, multi-theatre colonial war (1961-1974) – including a significant and active air component – looks surprising at first given the country's size and relative economic underdevelopment. But it becomes more understandable when you look at a combination of structural, political, and strategic factors that worked together.

Portugal was a small country (around 9-10 million people in the 1960s), but it mobilized a disproportionately large share of its population. The armed forces expanded significantly, with long conscription periods (often 3-4 years), allowing the state to maintain roughly 150,000-200,000 troops deployed across Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. The Air Force component remained relatively small but highly leveraged.

Tom Dolan**Biography**

Tom Dolan recently graduated from the University of Kent with a BA in Military History. His research has included Air Power, counterinsurgency, and Cold War military, political and diplomatic history, focussing on the US and Southeast Asia. His current work involves studying the role of Air Power in the counterinsurgency strategy in the 1960s. His interests lie more broadly in the relationship between military institutions, doctrine and operational outcomes, especially as they pertain to defence development, procurement and shaping a nation's defence identity and capability.

Title: From Counterinsurgency to Rolling Thunder: US Air Power in South East Asia, 1961 - 1963

Abstract

During the presidency of John F. Kennedy, US involvement in Southeast Asia from 1961 - 1963 saw the ready adoption of a modern counterinsurgency strategy. Air Power was central to US policy and Kennedy's "Flexible Response" doctrine, both in the establishment of indigenous forces, but also in clandestine CIA operations. By 1964 however, US involvement had escalated and counterinsurgency had broken down, replaced by the mass use of Air Power with Operation Rolling Thunder. Whilst this shift has been explored, the role of air power and the US Air Force in shaping and changing US strategy has been greatly overlooked. The extent to which Air Power was adapted effectively, how institutional and operational constraints shaped its use, and how it in turn shaped the counterinsurgency strategy, therefore warrants closer inspection. Certainly, operational failings have been understood in a grand sense, but the mechanics have not been fully appreciated. By drawing upon declassified internal histories and contemporary monographs from the CIA and USAF, this paper will examine the interactions between the CIA, USAF, and civilian leadership in defining the early US approach to counterinsurgency in Southeast Asia. Operations in Laos demonstrated that despite friction, the CIA and USAF were somewhat successfully integrated under a civilian-led command structure and in a supporting role. The USAF was determined not to be left behind in counterinsurgency efforts, but doctrinal inflexibility contributed to the shift to large-scale and ultimately ineffective air operations and wider escalation. This paper therefore seeks to contribute to the wider debates on the relationship between doctrine, institutional dogmas and the difficulties of counterinsurgency and irregular warfare, by foregrounding Air Power as a formative part of the ultimately failed US efforts in Southeast Asia.

Matti Tokola**Biography**

Matti Tokola is a doctoral researcher in the Department of Geographical and Historical Studies at University of Eastern Finland. He is currently working as a visiting researcher in the Institute of Military History at Swedish National Defense University in Stockholm. His research focuses on Cold War Air Power, military culture and the lived experiences of fighter pilots in Sweden. His work combines oral history with approaches from military sociology and memory studies to examine how threat, risk and professional identity were constructed within high-readiness air forces.

His doctoral dissertation analyses how Swedish military pilots experienced preparedness, accidents and geopolitical tension during the Cold War, with particular attention to organizational culture, institutional memory and the implicit norms shaping professional conduct. He is especially interested in how Air Power is understood not only as a strategic capability but as a social and cultural practice embedded in everyday routines.

Title: Air Power without War: Readiness, Threat and Experience in Cold War Sweden

Abstract

This paper examines how Air Power was experienced and understood by Swedish military pilots during the Cold War in a context where large-scale combat never materialised, yet constant readiness structured everyday practice. Based on oral history interviews with former Swedish fighter pilots, the paper explores how threat, risk and operational preparedness were internalised in a high-readiness air defence system.

Rather than focusing on combat or counterinsurgency in a conventional sense, the paper shifts attention to a different but related phenomenon: the lived experience of Air Power in a state of permanent anticipation. Swedish air doctrine was built on the assumption of a rapid Soviet strike, leading to the development of dispersed basing systems (Bas 60/90), frequent war-base exercises and strict readiness requirements. These practices created an environment in which Air Power was continuously enacted without actual warfare. The paper argues that Air Power in this context functioned not only as a military capability but as a social and cultural system that shaped how pilots perceived threat, responsibility and risk. Interviews reveal that while geopolitical conflict remained abstract, danger was often experienced through everyday operational risks, accidents and the loss of colleagues. At the same time, pilots described their role through a strong sense of professional duty, collective identity and trust in the organisation. By bringing together perspectives from Air Power studies, military sociology and memory studies, the paper contributes to broader discussions on how Air Power operates beyond combat. It suggests that understanding Air Power requires attention not only to its strategic use, but also to how it is lived, normalised and reproduced in organisational practice.

Jennifer Howe

Biography

Dr Jennifer Howe holds a PhD in War Studies from King's College, London, where she examined individual involvement in the Cambodian genocide. She currently teaches on security and defence at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom (Defence Studies Department) (focused on air power), Imperial College London (behavioural science and security), and at the Department of War Studies, King's College, London.

Dr Howe has extensive experience as a policy researcher, having worked for Pacific Forum (in partnership with US Dept of Defense), UK Parliament, and open-source investigation firms. She has published numerous policy reports on security issues and delivered her research to key stakeholders, including the US Department of Defense and ASEAN Regional Forum. She is also a content creator and runs a social media page focused on the history of war.

Her research focuses on armed conflict, insurgencies, and Women, Peace and Security. She is particularly interested in the social aspects of war and what drives people to engage in armed movements.

Title: Bombing and Khmer Rouge Recruitment: New Interview Evidence

Abstract

Between 1965-1973, the US dropped an estimated 2.8 million tons of bombs on Cambodia. The strikes, which were initially intended to disrupt Viet Cong supply routes and later to suppress a growing Cambodian insurgency, resulted in the deaths of up to 500,000 Cambodian villagers and the displacement of more than 2 million people.

Crucially, statistical evidence reveals that the Khmer Rouge - initially a relatively minor communist insurgency - grew exponentially during the bombing raids, eventually enabling them to seize power in 1975 and implement their genocidal regime.

While it is clear that the strikes had a major impact on the escalation of conflict in Cambodia, few studies have properly assessed the relationship between their relationship to Khmer Rouge recruitment, particularly from the perspective of the individuals who signed up to the movement.

This paper addresses that gap, drawing on interviews the author conducted in 2023 with 60 individuals who lived through the Cambodian civil war, a significant number of whom served as Khmer Rouge combatants. These interviews revealed a clear link between the US bombing campaign and decisions to sign up to the Khmer Rouge, as well as important nuances around the use of the strikes in propaganda and disinformation.

The paper will situate these findings in the wider literature on air power. It will explore what the Cambodian case tells us about the relationship between air strikes, insurgent movements, and recruitment, which continues to be subject to debate.

Panel 7 – Air Power in Contemporary Counterinsurgency and Crisis Response

Samuel Oyewole

Biography

Dr Samuel Oyewole is a Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria, and a Research Fellow at the African Center for the Study of the United States (ACSUS) and the Ocean Regions Programme (ORP) of the Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa. His research interests cover aerospace, defence, and security studies, geopolitics, African affairs, science policy and emerging technologies. He is the author of a monograph titled *Utilitarianism in Outer Space* (2024) and co-editor of *African Perspectives on Trump 2.0: US Foreign Policy and the New World (Re)Order* (2025).

Title: Beyond Bombing and Killing: African Air Power in Humanitarian and Disaster Management Missions

Abstract

Most of what is known of African Air Power revolves around limited case studies of a few countries and blocs involved in internal and transnational military campaigns against various armed groups (such as terrorists, insurgents, bandits, smugglers, militants, illegal miners, and maritime pirates), or regional peacekeeping and peace-enforcement. Although these have received inadequate policy, media and scholarly attention, some African air forces have also been involved in humanitarian and disaster management missions. Due to the limited African scholarship on the subject, little is known about the capabilities, strategies, contributions, challenges, and limitations of Air Power in humanitarian and disaster management missions, and about the possible implications for security, legitimacy, and public support for the military and its operations, especially in counterinsurgency. This presentation, therefore, examines the involvement of African airpower in humanitarian and disaster management missions, focusing on capabilities, strategies, contributions, challenges, and limitations, as well as the implications for (both national and human) security, (state and regime) legitimacy, and public support for the military and its operations, especially in counterinsurgency.

Neil Chamberlain

Biography

Neil Chamberlain graduated with an MA in Modern History from the University of Reading in 2006. He worked in private archiving until 2009 when he joined the Air Historical Branch (RAF) at RAF Northolt as the archivist. In this role he works to support the official Historians of the Royal Air Force and to ensure the capture and preservation of historical record from across the RAF.

Title: Operation OVERSTOCK: RAF Puma Assistance to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, August-September 1988

Abstract

The Royal Air Force and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise (HM C&E) had worked together before in the past – a few ad hoc Sea King and Nimrod flights to identify fishing vessels suspected of smuggling drugs into the UK. But in July 1988 HM C&E would approach the RAF with a request for assistance that would represent a first for both organisations. For the RAF it would be the first time that the Puma aircraft would participate in a counter-drug operation over UK soil. For HM C&E, it was the first time trying to halt a drug smuggling operation into the UK by helicopter. They recognized that they did not possess the resources they believed necessary to mount an effective operation but still wanted to demonstrate a capability to stop such a novel drug smuggling operation so that the method would not be copied by other organisations in the future. After some discussions, mostly over cost, the RAF agreed to assist and assigned two Puma's from 33 Squadron, RAF Odiham, to assist.

The RAF called it Operation OVERSTOCK (HM C&E called it Operation COMEBACK). The result was a helicopter dogfight over the Salisbury area between one of the RAF Pumas and the drug smuggler's Gazelle, which culminated in the seizure of 200 kgs of cannabis with a street value of £0.5 million and the arrest of a major drug smuggling organisation. Whilst the actual policing was done by police and HM C&E, the RAF still played a major part in the successful conclusion of this operation, which unfortunately has been almost forgotten about in the 38 years since.

This paper will explore this hitherto unstudied part of RAF operations, in an area outside of the traditional COIN, shares many similarities with operating in asymmetrical and high fluid environments.

Nina Hadaway**Biography**

Nina Hadaway is the Archive, Library and Research Manager at the RAF Museum. A qualified archivist and published author her current research interests relate to the United Nations and its use of Air Power and the way in which the Royal Air Force and its personnel contribute to the UN's work.

Title: From here to Timbuktu: Counterinsurgency and Humanitarian Support in Mali

Abstract

For much of the 21st Century the Sahel region in West Africa has been experiencing unrest and conflict stemming from a number of issues including tribal independence efforts and religious extremism.

Mali, home to the ancient city and centre of learning Timbuktu, is one of the countries affected. There have been waves of insurgencies which have caused changes in government as well as displacement, violence, and hardship for its general population. This paper focuses on the decade 2013-2023. During this time France, supported by international allies including the UK and the Royal Air Force, embarked on a military intervention at the request of the Malian government. Counter insurgency operations such as Operation Serval in 2013, initially centred on Mali, and Operation Barkhane which followed with a broader focus for the Sahel region, were undertaken. Several international missions were also established to support the government and general population. This included the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) which ran from 2013 until 2023 earning the dubious distinction of being the UN's most dangerous mission.

The interconnectivity between the activities of the multi-national forces, the host nation and the efforts of the United Nations and its partners in responding to the insurgent threat as well as the humanitarian needs arising during the conflict and work in stabilising the country will be explored.

The paper considers how Air Power was used during these endeavours and how the experiences in Mali can inform our broader understanding of its role in counter insurgency efforts and supporting humanitarian work.

Notes

