

## **MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Listed below is a series of important dates in the history of the Royal Air Force.

**1784 - September:** First air voyage in Britain, by the Neapolitan Ambassador, Vincenzo Lunardi.

**1903- 17 December:** First controlled flight by a powered aeroplane. Made by Orville and Wilbur Wright in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, USA.

**1907 - 1 June:** Air Commodore Sir Frank Whittle born.

**1912 - 13 April:** Royal Flying Corps constituted by a Royal Warrant.

**1912 - 19 June:** Central Flying School opened at Upavon, Wilts.

**1913 - 22 May:** First ceremonial flypast, 3 Sqn RFC.

**1914 - 4 August:** Declaration of War against Germany.

**1914 - 22 August:** RFC squadrons flew to France.

**1914 - 25 August:** First enemy aircraft brought down by 3 planes of 2 Sqn, RFC.

**1914 - 21 December:** First aeroplane raid on Britain.

**1914 - 24 December:** First bombs dropped on Britain.

**1915 - 19-20 January:** First airship raid on Britain.

**1915 - 12 August:** First enemy ship sunk by air launched torpedo, from a British seaplane.

**1915 - 19 August:** Col. H M Trenchard assumes command of RFC in France.

**1916 - 17 May:** Formation of the Air Board.

**1916 - 2-3 September:** First German airship shot down, by Lt W Leefe-Robinson of 39 (Home Defence) Sqn.

**1917 - 20 May:** First submarine sunk by an aeroplane.

**1917 - 17 August:** Lt Gen J C Smuts produces the Smuts Report on air matters.

**1917 - 29 November:** Air Force Bill, providing for the creation of the RAF, is given Royal assent.

**1918 - 2 January:** Air Ministry formed.

**1918 - 3 January:** First Air Council established.

**1918 - 1 April:** RAF formed by the amalgamation of the RFC and the RNAS. WRAF formed.

**1918 - 5 June:** Independent Air Force set up commanded by Maj. Gen. Sir Hugh Trenchard.

**1918 - 11 November:** Armistice. Hostilities cease at 11:00hrs.

**1918 - 13 December:** First through flight from Britain to India. Flown by Sqn Ldr A C S Maclaren, Lt R Halley with Brig. Gen. N D K McEwan, in a Handley Page V-1500 bomber.

**1919 - 14-15 June:** First non-stop crossing of the Atlantic by Cpt John Alcock and Lt Arthur Whitten Brown in a Vickers Vimy.

**1919 - 2-6 / 9-13 July:** First airship and first double air crossing of the Atlantic by an airship, flown by Sqn Ldr G H Scott and 30 crew in airship R-34.

**1920 - 5 February:** RAF Cadet College Cranwell opened.

**1920 - 5 July:** First RAF Tournament, later known as the RAF Pageant and then the RAF Display, at Hendon.

**1922 - 1 April:** Opening of RAF Staff College at Andover.

**1922 - 1 October:** RAF takes over military control of Iraq.

**1923 - 9 February:** RAF Reserve of Air Force officers formed.

**1925 - 22 October:** No 1 Apprentice Wing, RAF, established at Halton.

**1927 - 26 September:** Flt Lt Webster wins Schneider Trophy of Venice.

**1928 - 7-22 February:** First solo flight from Britain to Australia, by Sqn Ldr H J L Hinkler in an Avro Avian.

**1928 - 23 December:** RAF evacuation of 586 people from Kabul in Afghanistan.

**1929 - 1 March:** Air Cdre E A D Masterman becomes first Commandant of the Observer Corps.

**1929 - 24-26 April:** First non-stop flight to India from Britain by Sqn Ldr A G Jones Williams and Flt Lt N H Jenkins, in an RAF Fairey Monoplane.

**1929 - 26 April:** Foundation stone of RAF College building, Cranwell, laid by Lady Hoare, wife of the Air Minister.

**1929 - 6-7 September:** Schneider Trophy won by Flt Lt H R D Waghorn in a Supermarine seaplane.

**1930 - 5-24 May:** Miss Amy Johnson becomes the first female solo pilot to fly from Britain to Australia, in a D H Moth.

**1931 - 12 September:** The Schneider Trophy is won outright for the RAF by Flt Lt J N Boothman in a Supermarine S-6B.

**1931 - 27-28 October:** Non-stop flight from Cranwell to Abu Sueir, Egypt, by Sqn Ldr O R Gayford and Flt Lt D L G Bett in an RAF Fairey Monoplane.

**1933 - 6-8 February:** First non-stop flight from Britain to West Africa. Sqn Ldr O R Gayford and Flt Lt G E Nicholetts in an RAF Fairey Long-range Monoplane.

**1933 - 3 April:** First flights over Mount Everest, by the Marquess of Clydesdale with Col L V S Blaker as the observer and Flt Lt D F McIntyre with Mr Bonnet as the photographer. Both flights flown in Westland Wallace aeroplanes.

**1934 - 20 October:** Speed section of the Britain to Australia Air Race won by the D H Comet Racer, "Grosvenor House", piloted by C W A Scott and T Campbell Black.

**1935 - 23 July:** Report on Radio Direction Finding (later to be known as Radar) submitted.

**1935 - 8 November:** Prototype Hawker Hurricane fighter first flight. Designed by Mr (later Sir) Sydney Camm.

**1936 - 5 March:** Prototype Vickers Supermarine Spitfire fighter first flight. Designed by R J Mitchell.

**1936 - 15 June:** Prototype Vickers Wellington first flight. Designed by Barnes Wallis.

**1936 - 14 July:** Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding becomes AOC-in-C Fighter Command.

**1936 - 30 July:** RAFVR formed.

**1937 - 12 April:** Frank Whittle's first gas turbine engine, the U type, tested on the ground.

**1937 - 6 May:** Destruction of the airship, Hindenburg, whilst landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey.

**1937 - 5 July:** Flight of a helicopter, designed by Prof. H Focke, at Bremen, Germany.

**1938 - 23 February:** The Short Mayo composite aircraft, comprising of the seaplane Mercury and flying boat Maia. Successfully separated in flight at Rochester, Kent.

**1938 - 7-8 July:** Four Vickers Wellesleys of the RAF Long Range Development Flight, flew non-stop from Cranwell to the Persian Gulf and back to Ismailia, Egypt.

**1939 - 17 January:** Formation of the R Aux AF Reserve.

**1939 - 1 July:** Formation of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

**1939 - 27 August:** First flight of a jet propelled aircraft. Made in Germany, in secret. By a Heinkel He 178 designed by Dr Ernst Heinkel.

**1939 - 1 September:** Germany invades Poland. Air Transport Auxiliary formed.

**1939 - 3 September:** Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany.

**1939 - 3-4 September:** First propaganda raid, carried out by 10 Whitleys of 51 and 58 Sqns.

**1939 - 4 September:** 10 Blenheims of 107 and 110 Sqns and 14 Wellingtons of 9 and 149 Sqns, attacked enemy warships off Brunsbuttel. 5 Blenheims and 2 Wellingtons were missing. Flt Lt K C Doran was awarded the first DFC of the war for his part in the Blenheim operations.

**1939 - 6 September:** South Africa declares war on Germany.

**1939 - 10 September:** Canada declares war on Germany.

**1939 - 16 October:** First enemy aircraft of the war destroyed over British territory. These were two raiders shot down by 602 and 603 Sqns and anti-aircraft guns.

**1939 - 28 October:** First enemy aircraft forced down on British soil; a Heinkel He 111, near Dalkeith.

**1940 - 11 April:** First air attack on an inland target by RAF aircraft. The target was Stavanger airfield, which was attacked by 6 Wellingtons of Coastal Command.

**1940 - 24 April:** 263 Sqn's Gladiators, under the command of Sqn Ldr J W Donaldson. Were flown off the aircraft carrier, HMS Glorious, and landed on

the frozen Lake Lesjaskog, in Norway. The aircraft were operated under extreme difficulties until only one remained serviceable.

**1940 - 3-4 June:** Evacuation of Dunkirk complete.

**1940 - 11 June:** Malta raided for the first time. The island was defended by only 3 Gladiators at this time, named Faith, Hope, and Charity.

**1940 - 12 June:** First VCs of the war awarded to the RAF were awarded posthumously to Fg Off D E Garland and Sgt T Gray of 12 Sqn, for attacks on bridges over the Albert Canal.

**1940 - 30 June:** Occupation of Guernsey announced by Germany.

**1940 - 23-24 July:** First flight of an RAF aircraft over Berlin, made by a Blenheim on a reconnaissance sortie.

**1940 - 12-13 August:** Award of the VC to Flt Lt R A B Learoyd for his actions in operations against the Dortmund-Ems canal aqueduct.

**1940 - 15 August:** Heaviest fighting of the Battle of Britain.

**1940 - 20 August:** Winston Churchill's famous "Never in the field of human conflict..." speech to the House of Commons.

**1940 - 24-25 August:** Bombs fell on central London for the first time.

**1940 - 25-26 August:** First RAF raid on Berlin.

**1940 - 7 September:** Luftwaffe switches its main attacks from RAF airfields to London.

**1940 - 17 September:** Operation Sealion, Germany's planned invasion of Britain, is postponed indefinitely.

**1940 - 8 October:** Formation of the Eagle Squadron, made up of American volunteers flying with the RAF.

**1940 - 11 October:** First Beaufighter squadron operational.

**1940 - 25 October:** Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal becomes CAS.

**1940 - 25 November:** Prototype D H Mosquito first flight.

**1941 - 5 January:** Mrs Mollison (Miss Amy Johnson) was killed when the aircraft she was flying as a ferry pilot for the Air Transport Auxiliary, crashed into the Thames Estuary.

**1941 - 10-11 February:** Short Stirlings operated for the first time, against Rotterdam.

**1941 - 24-25 February:** Avro Manchesters operated for the first time, against targets at Brest.

**1941 - 2 March:** Start of BOAC flights between Britain and Stockholm, bringing in supplies such as high precision articles like watch springs and ball-bearings.

**1941 - 10-11 March:** Handley Page Halifax operated for the first time, against Le Havre.

**1941 - 6 April:** Fg Off Kenneth Campbell awarded a posthumous VC for his attack on the German pocket battleship Gneisenau, severely damaging it with a torpedo. The aircraft was shot down and the crew killed.

**1941 - 15 April:** Igor Sikorsky flew a Vought-Sikorsky helicopter at Stratford, Connecticut.

**1941 - 22 April:** Start of evacuation of British forces from Greece.

**1941 - 10-11 May:** Rudolf Hess, deputy Fuhrer of Germany, flies to Scotland, bails out and attempts to act as a peace emissary. He is confined in the Tower of London.

**1941 - 15 May:** First flight of a British jet-propelled aircraft, from Cranwell, flown by P E G Sayer in the Gloster-Whittle E28 Pioneer.

**1941 - 30 June:** Halifax bombers operated in daylight for the first time, against Kiel.

**1941 - 18 July:** RAF Ferry Command formed.

**1941 - 21-22 July:** Wg Cdr H I Edwards, an Australian of 105 Sqn RAF, awarded the VC for gallantry during a daylight attack on Bremen on 4 July.

**1941 - 11 September:** First operational patrols flown in Russia by RAF Hurricanes. They were from 151 Wing and assisted in the defence of Murmansk.

**1941 - 7 December:** Pearl Harbour attacked by Japanese carrier-borne aircraft.

**1941 - 7-8 December:** Britain and America declare war on Japan. Japanese aircraft bomb Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines.

**1941 - 25 December:** Hong Kong surrenders to the Japanese.

**1942 - 8 January:** Formation of the RAF Regiment announced, "for the local defence of airfields".

**1942 - 1 February:** RAF Regiment formed in Britain to defend airfields against airborne or parachute troops.

**1942 - 10 February:** Last RAF fighters withdrawn from Singapore to Sumatra

**1942 - 15 February:** Surrender of Singapore to the Japanese.

**1942 - 22 February:** Air Marshal A T Harris becomes AOC-in-C, RAF Bomber Command.

**1942 - 4 March:** Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary for Air, announced to the House of Commons the gallant role the RAF had played in the defence of Malta.

**1942 - 30-31 May:** First of the 1,000 bomber raids, against Cologne. Total number was 1,046 and 40 did not return.

**1942 - 5 July:** First flight by the prototype Avro York.

**1942 - 15 August:** The Pathfinder Force is formed.

**1942 - 18-19 August:** Pathfinder Force operates for the first time, against Flensburg, Schleswig Holstein.

**1942 - 4 December:** Wg Cdr H G Malcolm is awarded a posthumous VC for leading the attack on Chouigui airfield in Tunisia. All of his aircraft, Bisleys, were shot down.

**1943 - 1 January:** 6 Group, Royal Canadian Air Force becomes operational in Bomber Command.

**1943 - 5 March:** First flight of the prototype Gloster Meteor jet fighter.

**1943 - 11 March:** Formation of RAF Transport Command announced.

**1943 - 16-17 May:** Attacks made on the Mohne, Sorpe and Eder dams, by 617 Sqn Lancasters equipped with special mines, designed by B N Wallis. The force of 19 aircraft was led by Wg Cdr G P Gibson. 8 aircraft failed to return and 54 crew were lost. Wg Cdr G P Gibson was awarded the VC.

**1943 - 24-25 July:** First use of "Window" to jam enemy radars was used in a raid on Hamburg.

**1943 - 11 August:** Award of a posthumous VC to Fg Off L A Trigg, from New Zealand, for continuing to attack a submarine even though his aircraft was badly damaged. All the crew of the Liberator aircraft lost their lives.

**1943 - 17-18 August:** Attack on the German rocket research facility at Peenemunde. 600 aircraft were in the attack, of which 40 were shot down.

**1943 - 8 September:** Italy surrenders unconditionally.

**1943 - 20 September:** First flight of the prototype D H Vampire jet fighter.

**1943 - 24 December:** Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder becomes Deputy Supreme Commander, under Gen Dwight D Eisenhower.

**1944 - 18 February:** Raid on Amiens prison by RAF, Canadian and Australian Mosquitos, led by Gp Cpt P C Pickard. This was to help the members of the Resistance, who were prisoners there, escape. Gp Cpt Pickard and his navigator, Flt Lt J A Broadley, were killed when their aircraft was shot down.

**1944 - 19 May:** Announcement that 50 officers from the RAF, Commonwealth and Allied air forces had been shot for escaping from Stalag Luft III on 22 March.

**1944 - 6 June:** D-Day and the start of the liberation of France.

**1944 - 12 June:** First V1 flying bomb attacks against Britain.

**1944 - 14-15 June:** V1 shot down by a Mosquito of 605 Sqn, flown by Flt Lt J G Musgrave.

**1944 - 12 July:** First Gloster Meteor jet fighters went into service, with 616 Sqn.

**1944 - 21 July:** First operational flight by a Gloster Meteor from 616 Sqn.

**1944 - 8-9 August:** First air-drop of supplies to Polish patriots fighting in the Warsaw ghetto.

**1944 - 25 August:** Paris is recaptured by the French.

**1944 - 19-20 September:** Wg Cdr G P Gibson VC was killed whilst on a raid against Munchen-Gladbach and Rheydt.

**1944 - 12 November:** German battleship Tirpitz capsizes in Tromso Fjord, Norway, after being hit by 3 Tallboy 12,000lb bombs. The attack was made by Lancasters of 9 and 617 Sqn.

**1944 - 23 December:** Sqn Ldr R A M Palmer was awarded a posthumous VC for continuing to attack his target whilst under heavy fighter attack and on fire.

**1945 - 14 March:** First Grand Slam bomb, 22,000lbs, dropped. Dropped by Sqn Ldr C C Calder of 617 Sqn, against the Bielefeld railway viaduct.

**1945 - 29 April:** Hitler and Eva Braun commit suicide. Start of Operation Manna and the dropping of supplies to the Dutch in Rotterdam.

**1945 - 7 May:** Unconditional surrender of Germany.



**1945 - 10 May:** The RAF Lancaster "Aries" flew a number of flights over the North and Magnetic Poles, for navigation purposes.

**1945 - 16 July:** First atom bomb successfully exploded at Alamogordo, New Mexico, USA.

**1945 - 6 August:** First atomic bomb dropped in operations, was dropped on Hiroshima. The pilot was Col P W Tibbets, flying a B29.

**1945 - 9 August:** Second atomic bomb dropped on Japan. The target hit was Nagasaki. The pilot was Maj C W Sweeney, again in a B29.

**1945 - 14-15 August:** The unconditional surrender of Japan was announced by Pres Truman and PM Attlee.

**1945 - 2 September:** The 1939-45 war ended at 10:30 Tokyo time when the unconditional surrender was signed on the American battleship, Missouri.

**1945 - 20 September:** First flight by an aircraft powered by propeller turbine engines. It was a Gloster Meteor powered by R-R Trent engines.

**1945 - 7 November:** Gp Cpt H J Wilson established a new world air speed record of 606.25mph in a Gloster Meteor.

**1945 - 30 November:** The Air Transport Auxiliary was closed down.

**1946 - 22 May:** First flight of the D H Chipmunk.

**1946 - 2 June:** Announcement that the Auxiliary Air Force would be reformed.

**1946 - 12 July:** The formation of the RAF High Speed Flight under Gp Cpt E M Donaldson.

**1946 - 24 July:** First successful "live" ejection seat firing in Britain. This took place in a modified Meteor Mk3 and a Mr Bernard Lynch was fired out of the rear of the cockpit at 8,000ft.

**1946 - 7 September:** A new world air speed record of 615.81mph was set by Gp Cpt E M Donaldson in a Gloster Meteor.

**1946 - 27 September:** Death of Mr Geoffrey de Havilland when his DH 108 jet research aircraft broke up over the Thames Estuary.

**1946 - 5 October:** The announcement by a Government White Paper of the creation of a new Ministry of Defence.

**1947 - 3 January:** Reconstitution of the King's Flight at RAF Benson.

**1947 - 16 July:** World's first jet flying boat, the Saunders Roe SRA1, made its first flight.

**1947 - 14 October:** Maj Charles E Yeager, USAF, broke the speed of sound in the rocket powered research aircraft Bell X1, "Glamorous Glennis", in level flight.

**1947 - 14 November:** First flight of the Armstrong Whitworth AW 52 twin-jet flying wing research aircraft.

**1947 - 16 December:** Permission was granted by the King for the Auxiliary Air Force to use the prefix Royal.

**1948 - 23 March:** An aeroplane height record of 59,446ft was set by Gp Cpt John Cunningham flying a D H Vampire from Hatfield, near London.

**1948 - 14 May:** End of the British mandate for Palestine and the proclamation of the state of Israel was announced.

**1948 - 27 May:** Recommendation made that Air Cdre Sir Frank Whittle should receive an award of £100,000, tax free, for his development of the jet engine.

**1948 - 26 June:** Start of the Berlin airlift due to Russia severing all surface routes into the city from the west.

**1948 - 28 June:** Start of a British organised airlift to Berlin.

**1948 - 30 June:** Air Cdre Sir Frank Whittle's retirement from the RAF on the grounds of ill health, in August, was announced by the Air Ministry.

**1948 - 12-14 July:** 6 D H Vampire fighters of 54 Sqn, RAF, made the first crossing of the Atlantic by jet aircraft.

**1948 - 20 July:** First flight of the prototype Vickers Viscount.

**1948 - 6 September:** John Derry, in a D H 108, becomes the first Briton to break the speed of sound.

**1949 - 1 February:** WAAF became the WRAF.

**1949 - 12 May:** The Berlin blockade was lifted at one minute past midnight but the airlift continued until October, to build up supplies.

**1949 - 13 May:** First flight of the prototype Canberra twin-jet bomber.

**1949 - 27 July:** First flight of the D H Comet 1 jet airliner. The RAF's Nimrod would be based on this design.

**1949 - 6 October:** End of the Berlin airlift.

**1950 - 27 January:** Anglo-American agreement signed, providing for the issue of 70 B 29 bombers and their spares, to the RAF.

**1950 - 15 February:** Crash of a D H 108 research jet aircraft, killing the pilot, Sqn Ldr J S R Muller-Rowland.

**1950 - 1 May:** Crash of the last D H 108 research aircraft, killing the pilot, Sqn Ldr G E C Genders.

**1950 - 25 June:** Start of the Korean conflict.

**1950 - 22 August:** Announcement that RAF Sunderlands, from Hong Kong, were engaged on blockade operations in Korea.

**1950 - 12 November:** Announcement made that D H Vampires were re-equipping the RAF Far East Air Force in Singapore. The delivery flight journey of 8,500 miles was the longest jet delivery flight of any air force to date.

**1950 :** First public display of the “probe and drogue” method of air-to-air refuelling was carried out at the Farnborough Air Display. It involved an Avro Lincoln tanker and a Gloster Meteor Mk4 being refuelled.

**1951 - 21 February:** Sqn Ldr A E Callard flew a Canberra from Aldergrove to Gander, Newfoundland, in 4hrs 37mins, at an average speed of 449.46mph. Also on-board were the navigator, Flt Lt A Haskett, and signaller Flt Lt A Robson DFC.

**1951 - 18 May:** First flight of the prototype Vickers Valiant bomber.

**1951 - 25 May:** The first example of the Canberra B2 entered service with the RAF, with 101 Sqn at RAF Binbrook.

**1951 - 20 July:** First flight of the prototype Hawker Hunter.

**1951 - 1 August:** First flight of the prototype Vickers Swift.

**1951 - 31 August:** Wg Cdr R P Beaumont set the point to point Belfast-Gander record in a Canberra with an average speed of 483.91mph.

**1951 - 26 September:** First flight of the prototype D H 110 fighter.

**1951 - 26 November:** First flight of the prototype Gloster Javelin fighter.

**1952 - 3 January:** First flight of the prototype Bristol 173 twin rotor helicopter. This was developed into the RAF's Belvedere helicopter.

**1952 - 13 January:** First Neptune anti-submarine aircraft delivered to the RAF.

**1952 - 6 February:** Death of King George VI.

**1952 - 29 June:** Prototype Gloster Javelin crashed at Boscombe Down. The pilot, Sqn Ldr W A Waterton, escaped with slight burns.

**1952 - 16 August:** First flight of the prototype Bristol Britannia airliner.

**1952 - 26 August:** Point to point record, between Belfast and Gander, set by Wg Cdr R P Beaumont in a Canberra. Average speed was 411.99mph and was the first 2-way crossing of the Atlantic in one day by the same aircraft.

**1952 - 30 August:** First flight of the prototype Avro Vulcan bomber.

**1952 - 6 September:** Crash of D H 110 at Farnborough. 30 people were killed, including the pilot, Mr John Derry and his flight observer, Mr Anthony Richards.

**1952 - 30 September:** Announcement that Air Cdre Sir Frank Whittle would be the first recipient of the Churchill Gold Medal of the Society of Engineers.

**1952 - 3 October:** First test explosion of a British atomic bomb, at Monte Bello Islands, Australia.

**1952 - 1 November:** First established Airborne Early Warning unit, Vanguard Flight, formed for AEW trials, with 3 Neptune aircraft.

**1952 - 2 November:** Announcement that the RAF would receive 300-400 F 86 Sabres as a stop-gap measure, to be used by 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force.

**1952 - 2 December:** First flight of the Shorts SB 5 research aircraft. It would be used later in the development of the English Electric P 1 and the Lightning.

**1952 - 24 December:** First flight of the prototype Handley Page Victor bomber.

**1953 - 27 January:** Point to point record between London airport and Mauripur, Karachi, set by a Canberra flown by Flt Lts L M Whittington and J A Brown.

**1953 - 27-28 January:** Continuation of the above flight to Australia established a point to point record between London and Darwin.

**1953 - 4 May:** New aeroplane altitude record of 63,668ft was set by Wg Cdr W F Gibb in a Canberra, powered by Bristol Olympus jet engines.

**1953 - 5 July:** London to Paris point to point record set by Lt Cdr M J Lithgow in a Vickers Supermarine Swift.

**1953 - 27 July:** End of hostilities in Korea.

**1953 - 7 September:** New world speed record set by Sqn Ldr Neville F Duke, of 727.6mph, in a Hawker Hunter F Mk3. This was the only version of the Hunter to be equipped with reheat.

**1953 - 19 September:** World speed record over a 100km closed course set by Sqn Ldr Neville F Duke in a Hawker Hunter F Mk3, set at 709.2mph.

**1953 - 25 September:** New world speed record set by Lt Cdr M J Lithgow, at 737.7mph, in a Vickers Supermarine Swift.

**1953 - 18 October:** Unveiling of the Air Force Memorial at Runnymede, by the Queen.

**1953 - 17 December:** London to Capetown point to point record set by Sqn Ldrs J McD Craig and T P MacGarry, in a Canberra.

**1954 - 1 April:** Last operational sortie by an RAF Spitfire. It was a photo-reconnaissance sortie against Malayan bandits.

**1954 - 9 April:** Comet airliners suspended from flying due to 2 crashes caused for unknown reasons.

**1954 - 18 May:** Grounding of all Swift fighters due to a recent accident. Deliveries to the RAF had started in February.

**1954 - 14 July:** Crash of the first Victor bomber prototype, killing the pilot Flt Lt R V Ecclestone and the 3 other occupants.

**1954 - 19 July:** First flight of the prototype D H Comet 3.

**1954 - 3 August:** First free flight of the Rolls Royce "Flying Bedstead", by Cpt R T Shepherd.\*

**1954 - 4 August:** First flight of the prototype English Electric P 1 fighter. This was the first British fighter to exceed the speed of sound in level flight.

**1954 - 6 October:** First flight of the Fairey Delta 2 supersonic research aircraft.

**1955 - 11 February:** Report on the cause of the 2 Comet crashes found that the pressure cabin had failed due to metal fatigue.

**1955 - 23 February:** Limited production of the Swift FR 4 and research variants to continue but the earlier marks were to cease production.

**1955 - 29 August:** New aeroplane altitude record of 65,876ft set by Wg Cdr W F Gibb in a Canberra.

**1956 - 10 February:** Death of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Trenchard, aged 83.

**1956 - 21 February:** The branch of Air Electronics Officer established.

**1956 - 10 March:** World speed record of 1,132mph set by Mr Peter Twiss in the Fairey Delta 2 research aircraft.

**1956 - 1 October:** The first Avro Vulcan taken on charge by the RAF, crashed whilst attempting to land in very poor weather at Heathrow airport. The Captain and co-pilot ejected successfully but the four rear crew members were killed.

**1956 - 11 October:** First British atomic bomb dropped from a Valiant jet bomber, piloted by Sqn Ldr E J G Flavell, over Maralinga, Australia.

**1956 - 31 October:** Start of Operation Musketeer. RAF offensives flown against Egyptian targets following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal.

**1957 - 10 March:** All R Aux AF squadrons were disbanded.

**1957 - 15 May:** Britain's first thermonuclear weapon, the prototype Yellow Sun, was dropped from a Valiant of 49 Sqn, flown by Wg Cdr K Hubble, over Malden Island in the South Pacific.

**1957 - 15 August:** The RAF's first Guided Weapons Squadron was formed at RAF Valley, with Swift F Mk7s and the Fairey Fireflash (Blue Sky) missile.

**1958 - 22 February:** An agreement between Britain and the USA was concluded concerning the installation of 60 Thor IRBMs in Britain for a 5 year period. The missiles would be operated under a "dual key" arrangement between the RAF and the USAF.

**1958 - 5 May:** The Canberra squadrons assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> TAF in Germany acquired a nuclear capability.

**1958 - 1 September:** First RAF Thor squadron, 77 Sqn (SM), formed at RAF Feltwell.

**1958 - 19 October:** Church of St Clement Danes was reconsecrated as the Church of the Royal Air Force in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen.

**1959 - 1 January:** 2<sup>nd</sup> TAF was renamed RAF Germany.

**1959 - 9 June:** A Valiant of 214 Sqn, flown by Wg Cdr M J Beetham, made the first non-stop flight between Britain and Cape Town.

**1960 - 17 February:** Announcement from the Air Minister stated that a Ballistic Missile Early Warning System would be established at Fylingdales in North Yorkshire.

**1960 - 25-26 May:** First non-stop flight between Britain and Singapore was made by a 214 Sqn Valiant flown by Sqn Ldr J H Garstin.

**1960 - 29 June:** The Lightning first entered squadron service, with 74 Sqn, at RAF Coltishall.

**1960 - 31 July:** End of Malayan Emergency and Operation Firedog.

**1962 - 1 January:** Bomber Command initiated a permanent QRA (quick reaction alert) capability, with 1 aircraft from each V-force squadron at 15 mins readiness.

**1962 - 5 August:** A Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed in Moscow by Britain, the USA and the USSR.

**1963 - February:** The Blue Steel nuclear air to surface stand-off missile was declared operational. The first squadron to be equipped was 617 Sqn at RAF Scampton, with Vulcan B2s.

**1963 - March:** A Valiant air-refuelled a Vulcan on a record non-stop flight to Aden from Britain. The flight of 3,673 miles took 6hrs and 13mins.

**1963 - 17 September:** The Ballistic Missile Early Warning System, (BMEWS), at RAF Fylingdales, was declared operational.

**1964 - 7 March:** First flight of the Kestrel, which was the forerunner of the Harrier.

**1964 - 1 April:** A Unified Ministry of Defence was formed.

**1964 - 3 July:** The Queen's Colour for the Royal Air Force in the United Kingdom, was presented by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace.

**1964 - 28 September:** First flight of the first prototype of the TSR 2.

**1964 - October:** A squadron formed from members of the UK, USA and Germany was established at RAF West Raynham, to evaluate the Hawker P 1129 Kestrel. This would ultimately evolve into the Harrier.

**1965 - 6 April:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer, James Callaghan, announced the cancellation of the TSR 2.

**1966 - 3 January:** The RAF Technical College was relocated from RAF Henlow to the RAF College Cranwell.

**1966 - 22 February:** Due to the cancellation of the TSR 2, an announcement was made to the effect that an order for 50 General Dynamics F 111K aircraft from the USA had been placed. They were intended to replace the Canberras of the RAF.

**1966 - 19 December:** First Lockheed C 130 Hercules for the RAF was delivered.

**1967 - 28-31 March:** Operation Mop Up; the bombing of the tanker Torrey Canyon which had run aground near Lands End and was spilling crude oil into the sea, involved RAF Hunters assisting the Buccaneers of 736 Sqn, FAA.

**1967 - 1 November:** The beginning of the military withdrawal from Aden. This was the largest RAF airlift since the Berlin airlift.

**1968 - 16 January:** Due to sweeping defence cuts, the F 111Ks on order from the USA were cancelled and the RAF would inherit the Navy's Buccaneers. The Navy would lose the carrier fleet, the RAF would withdraw from the Far East and the Persian Gulf and there would be an acceleration of the run down of RAF personnel over the next four to five years.

**1968 - 30 April:** Bomber and Fighter Commands were merged to form RAF Strike Command.

**1968 - 28 June:** First flight of the first production Nimrod MR1 maritime patrol aircraft.

**1968 - 20 July:** First of the McDonald Douglas Phantom FGR2s for the RAF, ordered due to the cancellation of both the TSR2 and the F111K, arrived at Aldergrove from St. Louis, USA.

**1968 - 28 November:** Coastal Command became 18 (Maritime) Group within Strike Command.

**1969 - 30 June:** The RAF V-force stood down from QRA and passed responsibility for Britain's nuclear deterrent to the Royal Navy's Polaris missile submarines.

**1969 - July:** 1 Sqn became the first operational fixed wing VTOL squadron of any air force in the world.

**1969 - 14 July:** The first detachment of RAF helicopters was sent to Northern Ireland to assist the Army.

**1970 - November:** An emergency airlift of supplies and aid to East Pakistan, following a cyclone, went underway.

**1971 - June-July:** Due to heavy flooding in East Pakistan and the Bay of Calcutta region in India, another emergency airlift of supplies was carried out.

**1972 - 1 September:** Strike Command and Air Support Command were merged to form Strike Command.



**1973 - March:** RAF Hercules mounted Operation Khana Cascade to airdrop food to famine struck villages in West Nepal.

**1973 - 1 September:** Support Command was formed from RAF Maintenance Command and various medical units.

**1976 - 31 March-1 April:** Near East Air Force disbanded.

**1976 - 1 April:** RAF Ghan in the Maldives was closed.

**1977 - August:** 208 Sqn, Buccaneers, became the first RAF squadron to take part in a USAF Red Flag exercise.

**1979 - 31 March:** The RAF withdrew from Malta, after 60 years.

**1982 - 2 April:** Argentinian forces invaded the Falkland Islands.

**1982 - 20 April:** A Victor completed the longest operational reconnaissance to date. It was airborne for 14hrs, 45mins and landed back at Ascension Island after searching 150,000 miles of ocean near South Georgia by radar.

**1982 - 30 April-1 May:** The first offensive sortie against the Falklands was flown by 2 RAF Vulcans during Black Buck 1. It was supported by 11 Victor tankers and was then the longest range bombing raid under combat conditions, ever. It dropped 21 1,000lb bombs across Port Stanley's main runway.

**1982 - 15 May:** A new world distance record for an operational reconnaissance sortie was created by a Nimrod of 201 Sqn which covered a distance of 8,300 miles in 19hrs, 5mins.

**1982 - 20 May:** Three Harrier GR3s of 1 Sqn flown by Wg Cdr P T Squire, Sqn Ldr R D Iveson and Sqn Ldr J J Pook, made their first attack of the campaign.

**1982 - 14 June:** Argentinian forces in the Falklands surrendered.

**1982 - 17 October:** The first Phantom FGR 2, of 29 Sqn, arrived at RAF Stanley.

**1984 - 3 November-16 December 1985:** RAF Hercules took part in Operation Bushel, the humanitarian airlift of supplies to Ethiopia.

**1985 - 12 May:** The airfield at Mount Pleasant was opened by His Royal Highness Prince Andrew. RAF Mount Pleasant officially opened on 1 May 1986.

**1986 - 1 April:** The RAF Marine Branch was disbanded.

**1989 - 20 July:** Announcement that female pilots would be allowed to be employed in non-combat roles.

**1990 - 10 May:** Flt Lts Julie Ann Gibson and Sally Cox became the first female pilots to fly solo in RAF jet aircraft, at RAF Linton-on-Ouse.

**1990 - 9-11 August:** Due to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August and a request from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, 12 Tornado F3s, 12 Jaguar GR1As and 2 VC10 tankers were sent to the region. This commitment was increased with Tornado GR1/1As, Nimrods, Hercules, Tristars, Chinooks, Pumas, Victors and Buccaneers throughout the campaign.

**1991 - 16-17 January:** Operation Desert Storm commenced. First use of JP233 airfield denial weapon.

**1991 - 17-18 January:** First use of Tornados armed with ALARM defence suppression missiles.

**1991 - 19 January:** First operational use of the Tornado GR1A reconnaissance aircraft.

**1991 - 26 January-8 February:** First operational sortie of the Buccaneer, providing laser designation for the Tornado force.

**1991 - 10 February:** First operational sortie of Tornados equipped with the Thermal-Imaging And Laser-Designating pod, TIALD.

**1991 - 28 February:** Offensive operations against Iraq ceased at 05:00hrs local time.

**1991 - 1 March:** The RAF's first female navigator, Fg Off Anne-Marie Dawe, graduated from 6 FTS RAF Finningley.

**1991 - 14 April:** RAF Chinooks took part in Operation Haven, the airlift of humanitarian aid to the Kurdish refugees.

**1991 - 16 December:** A press release stated that the restriction on female fast jet aircrew had been lifted.

**1992 - 14 January:** The first female pilot selected for fast jet training, Flt Lt Sally Cox, joined 128 Course, 2 Tactical Weapons Unit, at RAF Chivenor.

**1992 - 3 July-3 January 1996:** An RAF Hercules participated in Operation Cheshire, the humanitarian airlift into Sarajevo.

**1992 - 16 October:** First female helicopter pilot, Flt Lt Nicky Smith, graduated from 89 Course, 2 FTS, RAF Shawbury. She was awarded the Blackwood Trophy.

**1993 - 31 March:** Operation Deny Flight was established over Bosnia. It involved 8 RAF Tornado F3s, 12 Jaguar GR1As, E3D Sentries and VC10K Tankers, amongst other NATO aircraft.

**1993 - 1 April:** RAF Germany was disbanded at 23:59hrs and relinquished its position as an Overseas Command.

**1994 - 1 April:** RAF Personnel and Training Command (RAF Innsworth) and RAF Logistics Command (RAF Brampton and Wyton) were formed from RAF Support Command.

**1994 - 1 April:** Disbandment of the WRAF.

**1994 - August:** The first female fast jet pilot, Flt Lt Jo Salter, was posted to 617 Sqn (Tornado GR1Bs).

**1995 - 27 June:** 2 Wessex of 84 Sqn, RAF Akrotiri, helped fight the biggest fire in Cyprus for 100 years.

**1995 - 30 August:** NATO Operation Deliberate Force was launched in support of UNPROFOR, to protect the Sarajevo Safe Area. The RAF flew 268 missions.

**1996 - March:** Cpl T Wardle became the first woman to join the RAF Regiment.

**1997 - January:** RAF Sek Kong in Hong Kong closed.

**1997 - April:** The RAFVR and RAuxAF were combined into the RAuxAF.

**1998 - 31 March:** At midnight, the RAF relinquished the nuclear role.

**1999 - January:** Operation Desert Fox commenced. Tornados from 12 Sqn flew 32 sorties against Iraqi targets.

**1999 - 24 March-10 June:** NATO Operation Allied Force commenced against Serbian forces in Kosovo and targets in Serbia itself. RAF Harrier GR7s, Tornado GR1s, E3D Sentries, Tristars, Hercules, Chinooks and Pumas were involved.

**1999 - 31 March:** A parade was held at RAF Laarbruch to mark the formal closure of the station.

