

Bedfordshire Magazine

A Quarterly Miscellany and Review of Bedfordshire Life and History



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RAY HAND

THIS YEAR MARKS the golden jubilee of 134 (Bedford) Squadron of the Air Training Corps, which was founded as 134 Squadron, Air Defence Cadet Corps (ADCC), under the auspices of the Air League of the British Empire, on 2 June 1939. The founder Commanding Officer was Squadron Leader V. T. Norwood. It was reconstituted as 134 Squadron, ATC, on the establishment of the Corps by Royal Warrant in 1941. For administrative purposes the ATC first fell within the purview of the former RAF Reserve Command; ultimate responsibility for the management of the Corps now lies with the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, RAF Support Command. The first batch of fifty ATC Squadrons formed from the former ADCC Squadrons were granted 'founder' status. Many are still active today and are recognisable by the letter 'F' following their unit number. 134 was among later batches of ATC Squadrons and, although the unit retained its original ADCC identity number, it did not receive 'founder' status. At that time, there was a certain amount of local prestige in having a local air cadet unit and some pressure was apparently applied to have units formed and supported by the community.

The squadron's first premises was a hut in Ampthill Road, Bedford, next to the site of the present Granada Rentals buildings. The unit has since been housed in a number of other locations, including Bedford School gymnasium, the army barracks at Kempston and finally RAF Cardington, where for many years the squadron occupied a former RAF recruits' billeting hut, now demolished. The Squadron moved to its present fine accommodation (formerly a mechanical and electrical testing laboratory used by the DoE) at Cardington in the autumn of 1986. It was officially opened as the Squadron's headquarters by the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Lieutenant-Colonel Hanbury, on 18 September 1987.

Commanding Officers of the Squadron during its first fifty years' existence include Captain Starey, Flight-Lieutenant Charles Woodcock, Flt-Lt George Baynes, DFC, DFM, and Flt-Lt Ronald Turvey, who held the appointment from 1957 to 1981 and who has remained involved in the life of the Squadron since his retirement, as a civilian instructor. The present Commanding Officer is Flt-Lt Alan Wiggins, RAFVR (T), who took up his appointment in April 1981, having previously served as the Squadron's training officer. Last year he was made an honorary citizen of Texas in recognition of his work on the International Air Cadet Exchange Scheme.

There were only six cadets in 134 Squadron on its formation in 1939 but its

strength has grown steadily and there are now some 60 enrolled cadets of both sexes and 20 adult staff. The officers (who hold commissions in the RAFVR (Training branch)), warrant officers, chaplains and civilian instructors all give their skills, services and experience in their spare time. Some of the adult staff are themselves ex-cadets of 134 Squadron or other units of the Corps. Cadet membership was restricted to boys until the end of 1985. Detached Flights were formed at Goldington (now defunct) and Flitwick, now expanding steadily under the command of Flt-Lt Charles Dicks, himself a former cadet of 134 Squadron.

Several former cadets of the Squadron distinguished themselves in the RAF or other armed services during World War Two. More recently individual cadets have served in the RAF in the Falkland Islands, in the Bands of the Blues and Royals, the Coldstream Guards and the Scots Guards, and in the Queen's Colour Squadron of the RAF Regiment. One former cadet became a pilot/flying instructor in the Red Arrows aerobatic team and was later appointed its manager, and another earned distinction as a professional boxing champion. One cadet warrant officer seconded to the Squadron was this year voted the best female air cadet in Britain.

In 1980 the Squadron was presented with its own standard, which was blessed by the Squadron padre, the Rev Michael Norton, Vicar of Elstow, at St Paul's church, Bedford, on 16 November, and subsequently marched through the town. The standard is proudly paraded at the annual Battle of Britain and Remembrance Sunday services at St Paul's church and on other ceremonial occasions.

Among the Squadron's many achievements during its first half-century have been its participation in the competition for the Sir Alan Lees Trophy for the best squadron in the ATC, the award of numerous drill competition cups and trophies and annual camp commendations. The Squadron was this year voted the best in the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Wing. On a lighter note, it won first prize in the 1979 Bedford River raft race and takes part in many fund-raising activities. The



Cadets loading their kit before flying to RAF Manston, Kent, for their annual camp in 1947.

(Bedfordshire Times).



Annual wing inspection, 1987, at RAF Wyton, Cambridgeshire, by the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire.

(RAF: Crown Copyright reserved).

Squadron has 'adopted' St John's School, Kempston (which caters for children and young people with severe learning problems) and cadets in their spare time assist the pupils in their Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme activities and play schemes. The Squadron's expertly-trained band and continuity drill squad appear regularly at local parades and are always in great demand by schools, fête organisers and so on.

The Squadron's record in sporting activities is outstanding. Its cadets reached the finals of the ATC national and regional rugby championships and a former cadet was awarded a Corps 'blue' for rugby. Girls representing the Squadron have taken part in the ATC regional hockey championships. The Flitwick detached flight this year won the youth section challenge trophy in the Bedford Canoeing Association's 100-mile challenge competition.

Regular 'interest visits' are organised for cadets, including the RAF Museum at Hendon and the USAF base at RAF Chicksands; Luton Airport; police, fire and ambulance stations; the RAE at Thurleigh and the Royal Observer Corps. Visiting speakers cover a wide range of topics from all aspects of air transport and demonstrations of practical skills to matters of current public concern. The Squadron has long-established links with the Shuttleworth Trust, the County Youth Service and Bedfordshire Fire Service and more recently close liaison has been set up with Airship Industries, also based at Cardington. Cadets regularly undertake stewarding and security duties at air displays at RAF Mildenhall, Henlow and elsewhere, and flying displays at Old Warden.

The Squadron has been supported by successive Commanding Officers and staff of RAF Cardington, by the Bedford branch of the RAF Association (whom the Squadron in return actively assist in connection with the annual Battle of Britain 'Wings Appeal') and by individuals in Bedford and the county. Particularly important is the support given by the Squadron's own civilian committee (currently under the chairmanship of Mr C. W. Bowman, MBE, BEM) which is roughly



A cadet NCO explaining an aircraft instrument panel to a group of young recruits.

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analogous to the governing body of a school or college. Administrative and financial support, including the provision of uniforms and some equipment, is given by the Ministry of Defence through RAF Support Command. Last but not least, the Squadron relies greatly on the generosity of parents, friends and other benefactors. The Squadron regularly opens its doors to parties of local scouts, guides and cubs, schools and other groups and to prospective cadets and their parents. Frequent 'open evenings' for parents, barbecues and staff-versus-parents cricket matches are long-established fixtures..

The Squadron's headquarters incorporate a spacious parade hall and comfortable lecture and activity rooms, an excellent 25-yard miniature rifle range, a flight simulator ('Link trainer') and modern radio communications, video, computer and visual aids equipment. The unit has its own safari Land Rover and a 28-seater coach, camping gear and sports equipment. Cadets receive technical instruction on aeronautics, radio and radar, navigation, space travel, meteorology and aero engineering, and they have the chance of gliding instruction, flights in RAF aircraft and summer camps at RAF stations in the UK and overseas. They learn map-reading skills on long distance marches and walks and enjoy camping under canvas, with 'survival' and adventure training, as well as being trained in leadership, music, first aid, aero modelling and the correct use of rifles.

The Squadron parades at its headquarters every Monday and Thursday and sometimes at weekends. There is no commitment on the part of any cadet to join the RAF or any other of HM Forces as a result of enrolment in the ATC, nor to undertake any reserve liability. Prospective cadets may join as probationers at 13 and can be enrolled into the Corps at any age from 13 years 3 months to 18 years: they can remain until they are 20.

The Golden Jubilee year has been marked by several events, including a service of thanksgiving at St Peter de Merton, Bedford, in May, followed by a parade through Bedford; a successful 'hangar dance' at Cardington where the music, dress and atmosphere of the 1940s was effectively re-created; an exhibition at Bedford Central Library and a spectacular international air display at Cardington in July, featuring a wide variety of aircraft, vintage and modern – this is thought to be the first event of its kind ever organised by an ATC Squadron. The celebrations ended with a guest night in October, at which many ex-cadets and staff of the Squadron and a large number of friends were present.

Throughout the fifty years since 134 Squadron's foundation it has striven to carry out the aims of the ATC in promoting among young people a practical interest in aviation, fitting them for service in any branch of HM Forces or in civilian occupations; offering service to the community; and training and developing those qualities which contribute to the making of a responsible leader and a good citizen. The Squadron can be proud of its record in endeavouring, during its first half-century both to achieve these objectives and to maintain the spirit of the ATC as expressed in the Corps' motto 'Venture Adventure'. Onward, then, to the centenary!