

CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZATION OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

Control

1. The Royal Air Force, like the Navy and the Army, is loyal to the Crown but is controlled by Parliament which harmonizes with the principle that our armed forces are subordinate to Civil Authority. Parliament votes the money needed to support the Air Force and, through the Air Force Act, lays down the law by which the Air Force is to be governed.
2. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet hold supreme responsibility for national defence. They exercise control of the armed forces through the Defence Council which is the main forum in which broad issues of defence policy are considered in relation to the Government's foreign, economic and home policies. The Secretary of State for Defence, appointed by the Prime Minister, is the Chairman of the Defence Council.
3. Each of the three Services is controlled by a board of senior officers, ie Admiralty Board, Army Board, and Air Force Board. The heads of the Service Boards are members of the Defence Council and each Board controls its own Service in accordance with the decisions made by the Defence Council. Thus under the direction of the Defence Council, the Air Force Board controls the Royal Air Force.
4. Each member of the Air Force Board is a senior officer or civil servant heading a specialist Branch concerned with a particular section of Royal Air Force work; all these Branches added together are called "The Air Force Department" of the Ministry of Defence (MOD(Air)). The specialist Branches are themselves sub-divided into a number of Directorates headed by Director Generals and Directors and it is these MOD staffs who form the Headquarters of the Royal Air Force from which all policy direction to the rest of the Royal Air Force emanates. The head of one of these Directorates, an Air Vice-Marshal who is the Director General of RAF Training (DGT), looks after the policies concerning the Air Training Corps.
5. Outside the Ministry of Defence the directives of the Air Force Department are put into effect by:
 - a. *RAF Commands*. Commands are either functional, ie in charge of a number of units carrying out similar types of air force work, or geographical, ie in charge of overall air force functions in a particular part of the world. At present, 1983, there are two functional Commands—Strike Command and Support Command, and one geographical Command—RAF Germany.
 - b. *RAF Groups and Air Headquarters*. Sub-headquarters called Group, Air or Field Headquarters control specialist units, eg those flying a particular class of aircraft such as fighters. However, sub-headquarters are established only in Strike Command where the expense is considered advisable and necessary; other Commands control their units directly.
 - c. *RAF Units and Stations*. Unit is the title applied to elements of the RAF which are established to cover a particular function, eg Maintenance Unit, Signals Unit. The basic operational unit is the squadron; squadrons are equipped

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with aircraft or missiles or they may be units of the RAF Regiment; and according to their size and role, squadrons may be sub-divided into two or more flights. The location of an individual unit or number of units is known as a Royal Air Force station. Normally, the administration of a Royal Air Force station is undertaken by a separately established station staff which, too, is composed of squadrons.

6. Thus the framework of the Royal Air Force is:

PARLIAMENT

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AIR FORCE DEPARTMENTS

COMMANDS

GROUPS

AIR or FIELD HEADQUARTERS

UNITS

Strike Command

7. Strike Command controls all the RAF offensive and defensive operations at home and overseas, except those of RAF Germany. It does this through three Group Headquarters plus one Field Headquarters (Military Air Traffic Operations (MATO)) in the UK, one Air Headquarters overseas in Cyprus, and two RAF Stations overseas—RAF Gibraltar and RAF Hong Kong. Command, Group and other Headquarters are themselves "Units" and are located on RAF Stations; for instance Strike Command Headquarters is located at RAF High Wycombe. The sub-headquarters of Strike Command are described in the following paragraphs.

8. **No 1 Group.** No 1 Group comprises the:

- a. Strike/attack force.
- b. Reconnaissance force.
- c. Air-to-air refuelling force.
- d. Battlefield support forces.
- e. Miscellaneous forces for communications and radar calibration.

The strike/attack aircraft of this Group, which are normally UK-based, would go out to seek and attack enemy targets on the ground, backed up by the dedicated reconnaissance and in-flight refuelling forces. The battlefield support forces include long range transport aircraft to take troops and equipment to the operational theatre, and tactical transport and short range offensive aircraft, which would be used primarily to support battlefield operations. The miscellaneous aircraft tasks in the Group include VIP communications, the Queen's Flight and radar calibration.

9. **No 11 Group.** No 11 Group comprises:

- a. The air defence system, ie the fighter and surface-to-air missile (SAM) squadrons and the systems warning the approach of enemy aircraft or rockets. Basically the aircraft in this Group attack targets in the air.
- b. The airborne early warning (AEW) force.
- c. The associated ground radars and communications.

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Thus the Group provides the earliest possible warning of the approach to the UK of any air threat and defends the UK against air attack.

10. **No 18 Group.** Together with the Royal Navy and our NATO allies, 18 Group is responsible for the safety of sea communications in the Atlantic, North Sea and home waters. It administers the RAF Search & Rescue force and all RAF Marine Craft units. It is sub-divided into the Northern and Southern Maritime Air Regions, and includes RAF Gibraltar.

11. **Air Headquarters Cyprus.** Strike Command exercises national and international responsibilities through AHQ Cyprus. The main tasks are the provision of support for the forces of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of which Greece and Turkey are members. In addition, facilities are maintained to fulfil United Nations commitments in the area.

12. **Military Air Traffic Operations (MATO).** MATO is the Field Headquarters responsible for implementing air traffic control policy in the closest co-operation with its civilian equivalent.

Support Command

13. Support Command's function is to provide the personnel and materiel resources necessary to sustain the Royal Air Force. Thus the Command not only trains all the men and women who enter the Royal Air Force, but also provides the equipment they need for their jobs; it not only trains the pilots and aircrew but also provides the aircraft, equipment and the skilled personnel needed to keep them flying. The Command's main work is:

- a. The training task, which extends from new recruit to staff officer.
- b. The supply task which is to store all the thousands of different items of equipment required to support the RAF and to make issues as required.
- c. The engineering task, which is to service, modify, re-condition, convert, repair and salvage any item of equipment used by the RAF.
- d. The signals task, which is to provide ground radio engineering services for the RAF worldwide including communication, air traffic control, air defence radar, and ground based navigation systems.
- e. The administration of a number of specialist formations whose functions are directly controlled by MOD, eg:
 - (1) The RAF College and Staff College
 - (2) The Officers and Aircrew Selection Centre
 - (3) The RAF Supply Control Centre
 - (4) The Personnel Management Centre
 - (5) Headquarters Air Cadets

RAF Germany

14. RAF Germany has two main tasks:

- a. The air defence of the former British Zone of Germany and the maintenance of access to Berlin through the Berlin air corridor. This is an international responsibility arising from agreements which require the USA, UK and France to share the responsibility of maintaining the freedom of the airspace over the Federal Republic of Germany and the right of access to Berlin.

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- b. The provision of offensive support, air reconnaissance and air defence forces for support of NATO operations. The Commander in Chief RAF Germany is also the NATO Commander of the 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force of which RAF Germany is one element.

Thus this geographical command operates air power in all its functions, *eg* offensive, defensive, in support of land forces and in reconnaissance.

Units and Stations

15. More than one unit can be located on an RAF station. If the units are mostly operational squadrons, *ie* squadrons flying aircraft designed to perform an offensive, defensive or reconnaissance air role, the station is known as an operational station. Other stations can be flying stations, *eg* stations housing Flying Training Schools; or non-flying stations, *eg* stations housing Maintenance Units or Command/Group Headquarters.

16. A station's organization varies according to the needs of the units that it houses but the framework is common to all. The Station Commander is in overall control and he has a staff, normally arranged in three sections called wings, to provide supporting services so that the units located at the station may function efficiently. The framework is as follows:

- a. Operations or Flying Wing.
- b. Engineering Wing which provides engineering services for the whole station as well as any flying or technical units located there.
- c. Administrative Wing which provides the backing needed to enable everyone on the station to live and work effectively. This wing is therefore concerned with such things as accommodation, equipment, pay, catering and medical services.

17. Fig 1 is a photograph of an RAF station with a grass airfield. Such a station will cover an area of ground of some 200 hectares (500 acres). A station with long runways for operational aircraft will have similar buildings but with its extra airfield area may cover some 400 hectares (1,000 acres).

18. Many stations have changed roles over the years and signs of previous functions may still be seen. For example, in Fig 1, the aircraft dispersal pans used in the Second World War can be seen leading off the main landing area.

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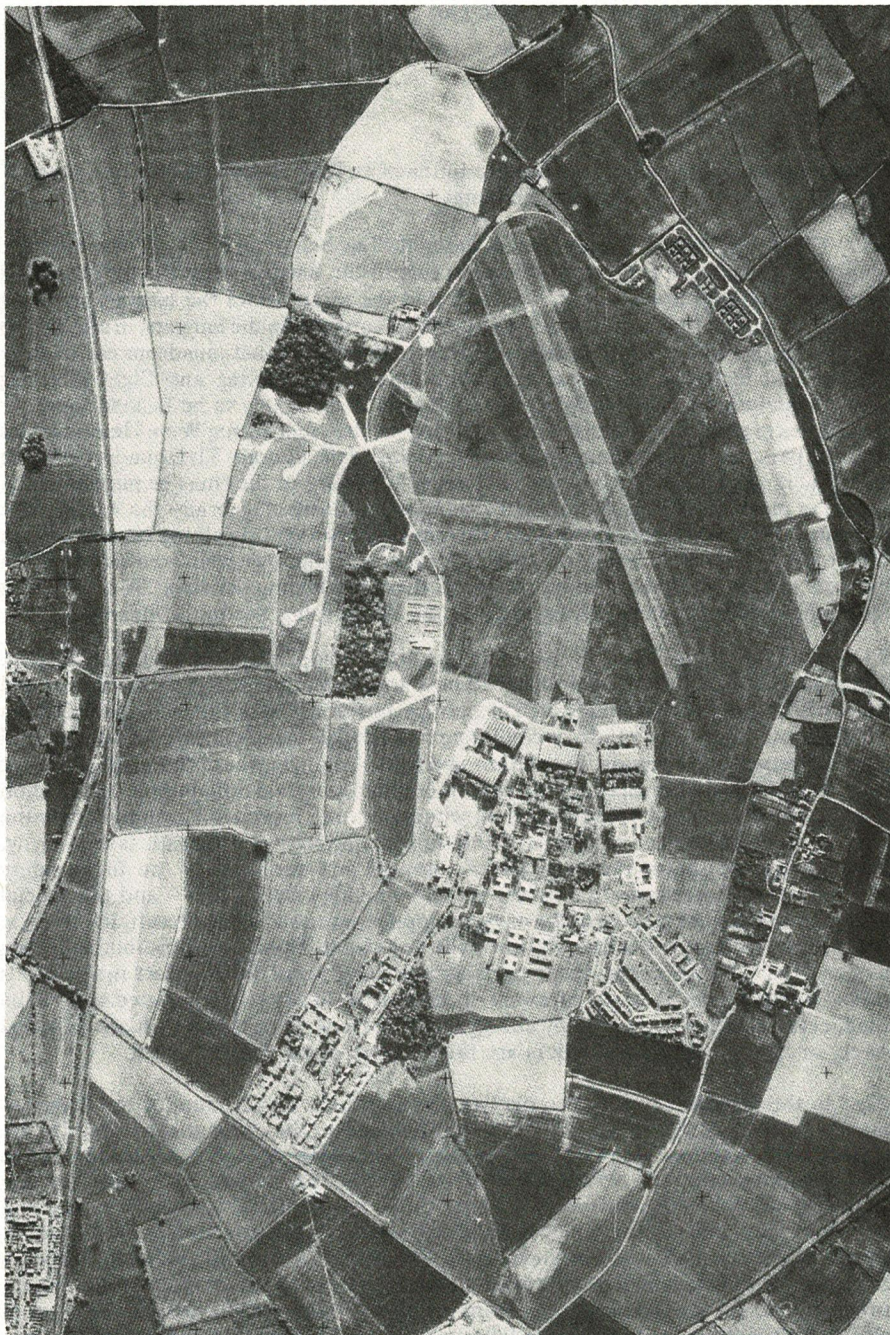


Fig 1 A Royal Air Force Station

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19. The primary divisions of a station are:

- a. *The aircraft manoeuvring area.*
- b. *The technical area.*
- c. *The domestic area.*

While reading the following general description of an RAF station, follow Fig 1 to see if you can pick out the appropriate buildings.

20. The aircraft manoeuvring area is thought of as being "in front of" the hangars. Generally speaking it is the area the other side of the hangars from the technical and domestic buildings and is where you will find the aircraft and the aircraft servicing platforms, Air Traffic Control and the Crash/Fire services. In the hangars, in addition to aircraft, you are likely to find the headquarters of the operational squadrons and all their aircrew and technical personnel crewrooms plus their briefing and flight planning rooms. Operations or Flying Wing Headquarters is also likely to be located there, or sometimes in a special building. There may also be the engineering Wing Headquarters with the personnel and equipment for the servicing of the aircraft. The squadron aircraft will be in the hangars when they are not wanted for flying, or they may be parked on the servicing platforms or on operational readiness platforms. Generally the hangars are numbered. There are special rules for driving vehicles and/or walking or marching in this area; so you will not be allowed to wander there on your own when you visit a station but you will be taken there to be shown all these interesting activities. You will learn more about aircraft manoeuvring areas in the Airmanship Section of this book.

21. "Behind" the hangars, ie away from the airfield side, is usually the technical area. There may be lines of offices and storerooms attached to the hangars themselves and there will be specialist buildings sited in a central position. These will include the Station Workshops — a specially designed building to house all the carpentry, metalwork and painting required to support the station task; the Armoury where the technical work required to support the aircraft and station weapons is carried out; and the MT Section which houses and services the vehicles needed to refuel, rearm and ground handle the aircraft, as well as all the vehicles needed to support the station's domestic task. Nearby, too, will be the special building for the storage and servicing of the flight safety equipments — parachutes, life-saving jackets, dinghies and so on — and the special arrangements for the storage of the oxygen supplies required by the aircraft. In this area, too, the Station Supply building will normally be located. This is a purpose-built building to house all the equipment, spare parts and clothing needed to support the station's task — including the domestic furniture. Tucked away in a specially selected site will be the fuel storage depot — probably underground — from which the aircraft are refuelled direct or from which the refuellers are filled before going to the aircraft.

22. In the technical area is also likely to be found the Department of the Environment's Property Services Agency building which houses the civilians who organize the servicing and maintenance of the entire station's land and buildings. They usually do this by negotiating contracts with civilian firms outside the station. They also run the station's central heating unit which is a large boiler unit, fuelled by coal or oil, pumping hot water around the station to most of its buildings through ducts set into the ground — you can sometimes see steam rising from these in winter. There will also be the station's Standby Power Unit which supplies electricity for the station's operational requirement in the event of a breakdown of the main supply. As you can imagine, the amount of electricity needed to support the airfield lighting, communication services and operational buildings is considerable.

23. A little further back from the hangars, but sometimes mixing with the technical area, will be the domestic area where all the men and women needed for the station's complex tasks are housed, fed, administered, and provided with sport and entertainment in their spare time. Look at the approach road to the main gate in Fig 1. To the left and the right are some of the many airmen's married quarters where married airmen live; sometimes the station will control more married quarters at sites away from the station and link them with Service transport. At the main gate is the Guardroom where new arrivals report; where overnight stoppers usually draw their sheets and blankets; and where there is usually a map of the station so that newcomers can be guided to the correct building — provided that their credentials are in order and their identity checks are satisfactory.

24. Straight ahead past the Guardroom in Fig 1 is the Station Headquarters building. This is the heart of the station and houses the Station Commander, who heads the whole station operation, and his staff who oil the wheels through their day to day management of the catering, accommodation and recreational facilities and in the provision of any new facilities that might be required. Situated here, too, are the staff who control the money side; both the "public money" ie Government money which provides pay, allowances and station running costs; and the funds which are raised locally to finance recreational facilities, known as "non-public" money.

25. To the left, through the main gates, is the Airmen's Mess which provides meals and recreational facilities for airmen. It is usually a large brick purpose-built building with two wings; it will house the NAAFI Club which provides snacks and off duty relaxation for airmen and possibly a Cinema; the Station Hairdresser is likely to be located there and perhaps a newspaper shop at appropriate times. In addition, it will house the Corporals' Club which is a room or rooms set aside for the exclusive use of corporals, no one else being admitted unless specially invited. Nearby will be another building which houses the NAAFI shop selling food and a wide range of goods to all ranks and their families.

26. Usually not far from the Airmen's Mess will be the barrack blocks in which single corporals and airmen live, sometimes in single rooms and sometimes in rooms in which up to 12 men sleep at a time. Barrack blocks are usually comfortable, brick-built buildings in which there are good washing and toilet facilities and special rooms for washing and drying clothes. But all servicemen (and cadets) should have the skills needed to be self-reliant in temporary or tented accommodation when these are operationally necessary.

27. Near the barrack blocks will be the Station Sick Quarters which is a full hospital in miniature, housing the Station Medical Officer, the Station Dental Officer and their staffs. The ambulance will often be sited there, too, in case the Medical Officer has to go quickly to an aircraft crash or similar emergency.

28. A station will have a public-address system for special use including emergency announcements which certain members of the station staff must act upon at once wherever they happen to be.

29. There will be a Station Education Section somewhere near Station Headquarters, or in Station Headquarters, which will house the Station Education Officer and his staff. They provide facilities for studying for promotion examinations, for "O" and "A" levels, or other civilian educational qualifications which might assist airmen in working

towards their personal promotion and advancement. The Station Library will also be housed there and will contain technical and fiction books and information leaflets on most subjects of general and recreational interest.

30. Also in this area is likely to be the Station Church — or churches if more than one recognized religious denomination is located on the station. The Chaplains branch of the Royal Air Force is responsible for the spiritual and moral welfare of all personnel and the Station Chaplain is likely to be a uniformed member of this Service.

31. Near the barrack blocks will be the sports ground and not far away will be handicraft (and perhaps gymnasium) facilities. All stations also provide a choice of Clubs which all ranks may join, catering, either on or off the station, for most commonly practiced activities from music to fishing and golf.

32. On the domestic site will also be found the Sergeants' Mess which is a large purpose-built building in which all Sergeants to Warrant Officers are accommodated and in which they have recreational facilities. No one but members of this Mess may visit it or use its facilities without formal invitation. Nearby will be the Officers' Mess in which the same rules apply for officers, and near the Officers' Mess will be the officers' married quarters where married officers live with their families.

33. You will now appreciate that an Royal Air Force station is almost a small town, needing a lot of land and buildings to accomplish its task and needing to provide all the day to day facilities required by a large number of men and women — and their families — to live in as much comfort as possible and in good spirit. It is a place in which disciplined, civilized conduct is essential; if you use a bedspace, washing and toilet facilities that someone else is likely to need to use after you, then you must obviously clean it and leave it in the state in which you would like to find it. This also applies, of course, to any other property; whatever you break or spoil someone else cannot use, whether it be a football, table tennis bat, bedding or operational equipment. Ordinary, civilized conduct makes an RAF station a very happy place on which to be. Play your part in this way whenever you visit a station, and always remember that those who fly and service aircraft need such an atmosphere in which to operate efficiently.

Air Training Corps Affiliation to RAF Stations

34. Air Training Corps Wings are affiliated to RAF stations to enable stations to provide direct and effective assistance to air cadet units in their vicinity, principally by accepting visits by cadets who have completed their initial training. It is necessary that cadets have completed their initial training before making such visits because they will then know how to wear uniform correctly, how to drill, how and when to salute and how to conduct themselves in a military manner so that no embarrassment will result either to themselves or to members of the Royal Air Force. Such visits may involve night stops if the station has accommodation and later many cadets spend a week at an RAF station at home or abroad on specially organized camps.

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