

CHAPTER 1

THE AIR TRAINING CORPS—HISTORY AND ORGANIZATION

HISTORY

1. The forerunner of the Air Training Corps was the Air Defence Cadet Corps. This organization was founded in 1938 by the Air League of the British Empire, a body of astute private citizens formed to publicize the vital importance to Britain of aircraft for communications, commerce and defence.
2. Air Commodore J. A. Chamier, who was later given a knighthood, may appropriately be called the father of the air cadet movement. He retired from the RAF in 1929 and devoted himself to aviation matters. He was appointed Secretary-General of the Air League and later became the executive secretary of the committee formed under the chairmanship of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Salmond to establish the Air Defence Cadet Corps.
3. From the outset squadrons had to be fully self-supporting and controlled by a local civilian committee. Before a squadron could be officially recognized and registered, its committee had to certify that it had raised or possessed guarantees of £200 to meet the commitments of the first year, and was reasonably sure of being able to raise equal amounts in the next two years. Officers were selected by squadron committees and commissioned by the Air League. These officers had to pay for their own uniforms, as did cadets in many cases. Cadets paid 3d per week and the Air Ministry promised a capitation fee of 3s 6d for each proficient cadet.
4. There was considerable rivalry amongst towns wishing to be the first to form a squadron. The honour went to Leicester. But this was quickly capped by Watford forming two squadrons and being the first town to house its own units and put all its cadets into uniform. Thus the Air Defence Cadet Corps came into being and with it began the friendly rivalry that still exists between squadrons throughout the British Isles. On the 16th October 1938 the two Watford squadrons were inspected by Sir John Salmond. It was a surprise to all present when Sir John read a telegram of congratulations and good wishes for the future of the Corps from King George VI. The doubters were now convinced that this was indeed a national effort, having received the approval of the King who had himself been an officer in the RAF in 1918. By the end of 1938, 41 squadrons had been registered and at the outbreak of war on the 3rd September 1939, 172 squadrons were in existence.
5. As was to be expected, Air Ministry assistance to the Corps steadily increased as the war progressed, and it soon became apparent that the government ought to take over responsibility for its organization. Thus the Air Training Corps was established in 1941 with King George VI as Air Commodore in Chief. Air Commodore Chamier was appointed the first Commandant with his headquarters at Stanmore, while Mr J. P. Wolfenden (later Sir John) was appointed the Director of Pre-entry Training.
6. Undoubtedly the justification for the Corps was the educational and air training it was to provide, and, as a leading educationalist, Sir John Wolfenden was able to secure in this field the widest possible support. The Royal Warrant authorizing the formation of the new organization was dated 5th February 1941 and reads:

“Whereas we deem it expedient to provide for our youth the means of preparing themselves for service in our Air Force or in its Reserves or Auxiliaries or in the Fleet Air Arm of our Navy there will be established a Corps to be entitled the Air Training Corps.”

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Fig. 1 ATC Badge

7. The Corps motto—Venture Adventure—devised by Air Commodore Chamier, was adopted for the ATC and incorporated in the ATC badge (Fig 1) which, together with the ATC Ensign (Fig 2), was approved by the King. Officers were given commissions in the training branch of the RAFVR, and indeed everything was done to give this new voluntary and part-time corps as much official standing as possible, remembering that neither the cadets nor their officers were strictly embodied in the Services. Fortified by a nation wide appeal the launching of the ATC achieved tremendous success, several squadrons being formed within a few days—the honour of being the first of the new breed going to No 210 (Newport) Squadron.

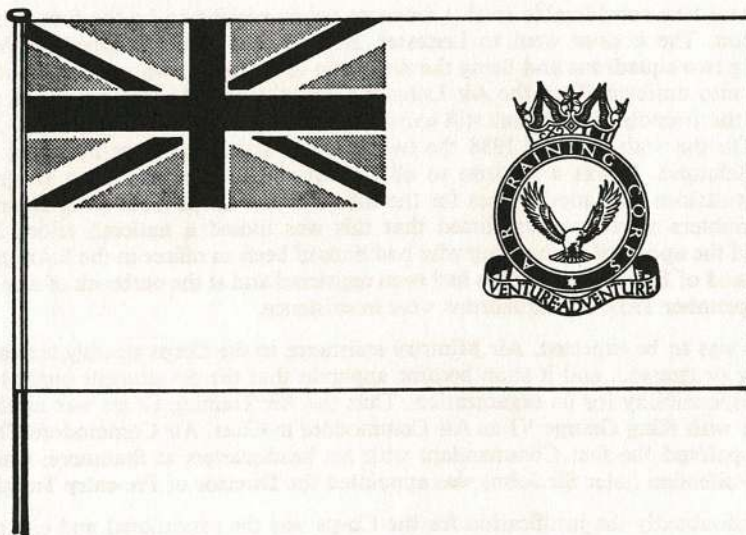


Fig 2 ATC Ensign

8. Unfortunately no complete record exists of the number of ATC cadets who entered the services or were awarded decorations for bravery during the war of 1939-45. By 1942, however, the ATC reached its peak strength of 210,000 cadets—about one in four of all young men aged between 16 and 18 years in the country. It is believed that

About 400,000 cadets found their way into the Services, the majority of whom joined the RAF. Later records show that a large number of former cadets won awards for valour and at least one received the Victoria Cross.

9. When peace finally came, Marshal of the RAF Lord Tedder said, "it is peace with teeth and the ATC have therefore a great part to play." The Corps had still much to offer beside a uniform, a club room and companionship. The proficiency certificate still paved the way to the RAF; squadrons attended camps getting to know the everyday routine of an RAF station; gliding schools became even busier; opportunities for powered flights were never so great and official trips abroad were being introduced.

10. In 1946 the ATC became part of Reserve Command which gave the movement much material help. In 1947 a new Royal Warrant redefined the aims of the Corps to include training in citizenship, the promotion of sports and the fostering of the spirit of adventure. In practice the Corps had always sought to do this but the restatement of aims gave these aspects of training an added meaning. In post war years the ATC consolidated, making changes from time to time to implement the Royal Warrant. The strength of the Corps settled down to about 30,000. In 1955 important administrative changes were made as a result of the Taylor Report, which recommended that the administration of Wings (which had been established in 1948) and control and direction of the Corps should pass to a Commandant, who would be responsible directly to the Air Ministry. In May 1960 Headquarters Air Cadets was set up to implement this policy.

11. Although gliding in the Air Defence Cadet Corps commenced in 1939, it was not until 1942 that it became an official activity in the ATC. By 1945 the gliding organization had built up into 84 schools. Training was on the "ground slide and hop" method, mostly in "Daglings" and "Cadets", but after the war the policy changed to one of dual instruction using the "Kirby Cadet Mk III" and "Sedbergh" gliders. There are 27 volunteer gliding schools and the Air Cadets Central Gliding School.

12. In 1950 a flying scholarship scheme was introduced and some 250 scholarships are awarded each year to cadets. The scholarships are tenable at civilian flying schools and clubs and students complete 30 hours of dual and solo flying.

13. In 1958 the Corps was given its own fleet of 50 Chipmunk aircraft for air experience flying. There are 13 Air Experience Flights located on a geographical basis to the best advantage of ATC squadrons, all being commanded by a regular RAF officer (except one which is commanded by an RAFVR(T) officer) and staffed by RAFVR(T) pilots.

14. In 1962 the ATC came of age and, to mark the occasion, a Banner (Fig 3) was presented to the Corps by His Royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Air Commodore in Chief of the Air Training Corps, who had been appointed to this post on the death of His Majesty King George VI. The dedication and presentation of the Duke of Edinburgh's Banner took place at a thanksgiving service held in the Royal Air Force Church of St. Clement Danes, London, on the 4th February 1962. The Banner is paraded on special occasions only, being most frequently seen at Annual Wing Parades when the Air Officer Commanding is the Reviewing Officer.

15. In 1967 it was felt that the time had come to re-examine the structure of the Corps and if necessary to re-organize it and improve it. Consequently the Ministry of Defence appointed a committee to "review the organization, administration and

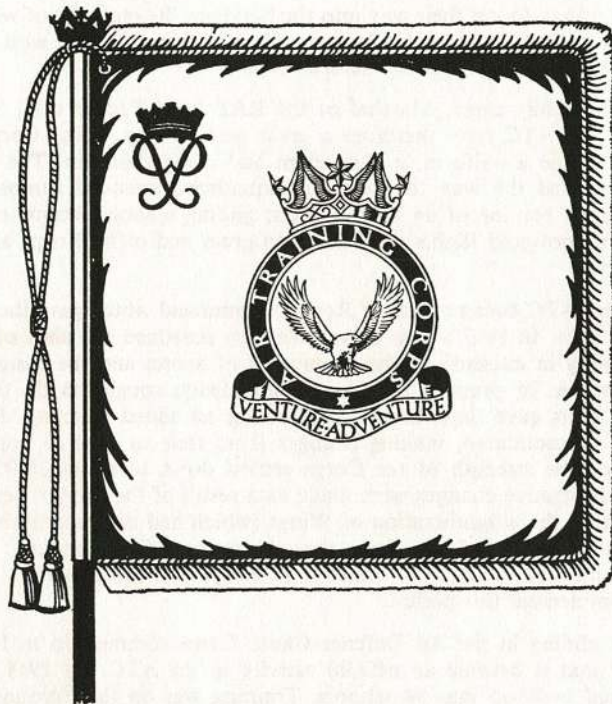


Fig 3 ATC Banner

training of the ATC and to make recommendations." The committee made a number of recommendations covering administration and training, the majority of which were approved by the Air Force Board. The report of the Committee (Morris Report) introduced several changes in organization, including a reconstructed Air Cadet Council and the introduction of Regional HQs, and set the pattern for the Corps as it is today.

16. At the same time a further change in the Royal Warrant redefined the aims of the Corps as:

- a. To promote and encourage among young men a practical interest in aviation and our Air Force.
- b. To provide training which will be useful both in the Service and in civil life.
- c. To foster the spirit of adventure and to develop the qualities of leadership and good citizenship.

17. A brief glance at the many and varied activities clearly shows that the Corps is keeping in mind the objects of its Warrant. In addition to flying and gliding, cadets have the opportunity of attending camps both at home and abroad; of taking part in overseas flights with Support Command; of visits to many foreign countries including America and Canada under the International Air Cadet Exchange Scheme; of doing welfare work among the community; of shooting; of adventure/expedition training; of participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme to mention but

a few. In October 1980 the first girls were allowed to join the Corps and after a two-year trial period they were officially incorporated. Approximately two squadrons in each wing were then authorized to recruit up to 15 girls each, and in April 1983 larger squadrons were allowed to recruit up to one-third of their total strength as girls.

ORGANIZATION

18. As with the Air Defence Cadet Corps, the basic formation in the ATC is the squadron. The first fifty squadrons formed are permitted to display the letter "F" after their unit number in recognition of the fact that they were the Founder Squadrons. Today the squadron stands very much on its own feet, ordering its own life within the framework of the Corps. Wing HQs administer a group of squadrons but the squadron is essentially a unit of the local community. There are two kinds of squadron—"open" and "school" squadrons. In "school" squadrons membership is restricted to past and present pupils of the school, while "open" means that membership is open to young people selected by the squadron commander.

19. A squadron may control detached flights in areas where there are enough cadets for a flight but not enough to form a squadron. In 1983 there were 904 squadrons and 112 detached flights in the Corps. ATC units are financed on the broad principle that the Ministry of Defence meets the cost of the official training programme, whilst other recommended activities and social facilities are provided from non-public funds raised by the civilian committees. Local Education Authorities can give financial assistance to ATC squadrons under the Education Act 1944 as part of the government's service to youth.

20. Responsibility for the general conduct and administration of a squadron is shared by its commanding officer and by its civilian committee. The squadron officers are volunteers commissioned in the RAFVR(T), work with the Corps part-time and are not paid for their services except when on specified training duties away from squadron headquarters. The squadron civilian committee consists of a Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and Members, all of whom are local citizens, with the Squadron Commander as an "ex-officio" member. The committee generally looks after welfare, finance, and local matters such as publicity, recruiting, site selection for the HQ building, liaison with other local organizations and so on. The treasurer has an important task, which is to administer two types of fund. The first type concerns official funds, or "public" money for Administration and Training: the second type, or "non-public" money, consists of locally raised funds for welfare, sports and similar purposes. It is the responsibility of the committee to raise, as well as administer, the non-public funds.

21. Squadron commanders secure the appointment of chaplains to their squadrons in consultation with the civilian committee and wing chaplain. They provide the chaplains with the opportunity of meeting cadets and of taking part in the squadron training programme. An honorary chaplain is eligible for membership of a civilian committee and may be invited to serve on it.

22. Groups of squadrons, usually on a county basis, are formed into Wings, of which there are 40. Each wing is commanded by an RAFVR(T) officer of the rank of Wing Commander. Each wing HQ has a small full-time staff for administration duties headed by a wing administration officer, and an establishment of RAFVR(T) staff officers who are responsible to the wing commanding officer for training standards in the wing.

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23. Groups of wings on a geographical basis are formed into Regions. There are seven regions each being commanded by a retired RAF officer who holds the rank of Group Captain. The regional HQ has a small full-time staff and is responsible for the implementation of the training programme and for liaison with other organizations within the region.

24. The organization of the ATC is closely linked with the RAF. The chain of command goes all the way up from squadrons to the Air Force Board not only on the Service side through HQ Air Cadets, but also on the civilian committee side through the Air Cadet Council; and at local level wings are affiliated to RAF stations for direct assistance in training. Visits are made by cadets to affiliated RAF stations on pre-arranged training programmes and RAF affiliated stations send instructors to ATC squadrons whenever possible. RAF stations, not necessarily the affiliated stations, also operate a parenting scheme which is set up for the distribution of RAF equipment, including uniforms, to squadrons.

25. Close relationship with the Royal Air Force is further maintained by squadrons attending camp for one week at an RAF station each year. This is the highlight of the year's training and provides an excellent opportunity for cadets to see the daily life of an RAF station and to gain first hand experience of the Royal Air Force. Almost every cadet who goes to camp is given a flight, the more fortunate among them flying in the station's aircraft.

CONCLUSION

26. The Air Training Corps has a history of which it can be justly proud, and every squadron has not only close affiliation with the Royal Air Force but also with its local community, an arrangement designed to help the squadron to provide a lively and exciting programme of training for cadets.

27. In this fine organization many useful and enjoyable activities and opportunities are available and there is no doubt that by hard work and determination cadets in the Corps can achieve many things which will be of direct benefit to themselves and which will indirectly assist the Royal Air Force and their country.

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