

“The sort of man”

Politics, Clothing and Characteristics in British Propaganda Depictions of Royal Air Force Aviators, 1939-1945

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Abstract

Throughout the Second World War, the Royal Air Force saw widespread promotion by Britain's propagandists. RAF personnel, primarily aviators, and their work made frequent appearances across multiple propaganda media, being utilised for a wide range of purposes from recruitment to entertainment. This thesis investigates the depictions of RAF aviators in British propaganda material produced during the Second World War. The chronological changes these depictions underwent throughout the conflict are analysed and compared to broader strategic and propaganda trends. Additionally, it examines the repeated use of clothing and characteristics as identifying symbols in these representations, alongside their appearances in commercial advertisements, cartoons and personal testimony. Material produced or influenced by the Ministry of Information, Air Ministry and other parties within Britain's propaganda machine across multiple media are examined using close textual analysis. Through this examination, these parties' influences on RAF aviators' propaganda depictions are revealed, and these representations are compared to reality as described by real aviators in post-war accounts. While comparing reality to propaganda, the traits unique to, or excessively promoted in, propaganda are identified, and condensed into a specific set of visual symbols and characteristics used repeatedly in propaganda depictions of RAF aviators. Examples of these traits from across multiple media are identified and analysed, revealing their systematic use as aids for audience recognition and appreciation.

For Daniel Anthony ‘Tony’ Wilson

25 January 1934 – 5 March 2018

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Table of Abbreviations

AG.....	Air Gunner
AM.....	Air Ministry
BC.....	Bomber Command
CC.....	Coastal Command
FC.....	Fighter Command
MoI.....	Ministry of Information
RAF.....	Royal Air Force
RAFFPU.....	Royal Air Force Film Production Unit
RFC.....	Royal Flying Corps
USA.....	United States of America
USAAF.....	United States Army Air Forces
WAAF.....	Women's Auxiliary Air Force

Introduction

O smiling, sun-browned youth who rode the sky
Like to the Sparrow-Hawk or summer swift,
And watched your shadow flitting on the drift
Far underneath you as you hurried by,

Six months ago today you put off bird
To gleam as ion in a nation's will,
To save the ruined friends and then lie still,
Spring never to be touched by summer's word.

Often unseen by those you helped to save
You rode the air above that foreign dune
And died like the unutterably brave
That so your friends might see the English June.

Haply, in some sharp instant in mid-sky,
When you, at the bird's summit, took the lunge
Of the foe's bitterness that made you die,
And the bright bird declined into her plunge,

You, from the Heaven, saw, in English chalk
White, about Dover, some familiar track,
That feet of yours would never again walk
Since you were killed and never coming back,
Yet knew, that your young life, as price paid over
Let thousands live to tread that track to Dover.¹

John Masfield's elegiac 1941 poem 'A Young English Air-Man', incorporates many of the British public's perceptions of the Royal Air Force (RAF) aviator during the Second World War. Youth, bravery, patriotism and righteousness all feature prominently alongside an emphasis on the pilot's role as a defender of the realm during the Battle of Britain. These sentiments are perhaps best remembered for their encapsulation by Winston Churchill, when he declared that "never before in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few."² Masfield and Churchill's appreciation for RAF aviators of all nationalities was echoed by Archibald Sinclair, Britain's Secretary of State for Air, in his forward to Alan W. Mitchell's 1945 book *New Zealanders in the Air War*:

The fighting qualities of the men of New Zealand –
whether serving with the Royal Air Force or with
the Royal New Zealand Air Force – are revealed on
every page, and the reader is left with a profound

¹ John Masfield, 'A Young English Air-Man' in F. Alan Walbank (ed.), *Wings of War* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1942) p. 122.

² Winston Churchill, 'The First Year of the War ("The Few")', 20 August 1940, The International Churchill Society (accessed on www.winstonchurchill.org).

sense of admiration and gratitude for the grit and the abounding cheerfulness and unflinching courage of those who have fought and won the great air battles of the war.³

By contrast, James Storrar, a Hawker Hurricane pilot during the Battle of Britain, wrote in a letter to his mother:

It is honestly amusing to meet people and be introduced as a fighter pilot, the different reactions are amazing[.] [S]ome think[.] I reckon[.] that a chappie who flies Hurricanes must be a golden haired Adonis[.] [I]t rather startles them to meet nothing more than a boy, too fat to be well built[.] to[o] young to be able to control himself, far too dirty & untidy looking to be a figure in the public's eye but nevertheless a fighter pilot, and typical of them all.⁴

Each of these cases clearly communicate the wartime British public's adoration for, and expectations of, RAF aviators and their work. Similar traits of youth, professionalism and heroism feature regularly in these aviators' British Second World War propaganda appearances, exemplified by a 1941 Air Ministry (AM) newspaper recruitment advertisement:

If you are the sort of man who can rally a flagging forward line.....if you are the kind of back who seldom lets the attackers through.....it's more than likely that the R.A.F. has a place for you. The quickness of eye, the sureness of hand, the powers of endurance of the man who is "good at games" are just the things needed for the short but strenuous business of "dog fights" at 30,000 feet....for the equally arduous job of piloting a bomber to Berlin and back. Flying the world's best aeroplanes is a job worth doing, a job that only comparatively young and fit men can do. *The chances are that you could be doing it.* And the time to VOLUNTEER IS NOW!⁵

No one has yet investigated the specific details of the RAF aviator's image in Second World War British propaganda. Authors such as Martin Francis have examined the RAF aviator's appearance in the public eye during the Second World War, and others like David

³ Archibald Sinclair, 'Forward' in Alan W. Mitchell, *New Zealanders in the Air War* (London: George Harrap & Co., 1945) p. 3.

⁴ James Storrar, Letter to Mother, 1940, Ref. No. X005-4835/002, Royal Air Force Museum Archive, pp. 2-3.

⁵ Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 15 January 1941, *The Times*, p. 6.

Welch have discussed the use of the RAF and its personnel as propaganda tools.⁶ Propaganda historians such as Welch have simply examined them as components of broader campaigns, while Francis and other social historians have approached their fame as a purely-reality-driven phenomenon. Simultaneously, military historians such as Max Arthur have confined their scopes to the lives of real aviators, using material produced for propaganda purposes, including official photographs and newsreel footage, as unbiased primary sources.⁷

This thesis bridges the gap between these fields of work, examining the details of the RAF aviator's image in multiple media of British propaganda during the Second World War. In doing so, it argues that a specific set of visual symbols and characteristics were deliberately and repeatedly highlighted as attributes of the propagandised RAF aviator, encouraging their identification and appreciation by the British public.

A basic background to the air war in Britain

Before examining the Second World War, a basic comprehension of aviation in Britain before the conflict is required for contextual support. At the commencement of hostilities in 1914, aviation was in its infancy. The aerial crossing the English Channel remained a relative novelty five years after Louis Blériot's first successful attempt. Britain's Royal Flying Corps (RFC) was a little over two years old, and the first use of aerial bombardment by Italian forces in Libya only three years earlier had garnered much attention and controversy.⁸ Accordingly, opinion on aircraft and their potential use, both public and military, was divided into a multitude of views ranging from terror to inspiration to dismissiveness. Aircraft were ever-increasingly used in a variety of roles in almost every theatre during the conflict. On the Western Front, advances in technology such as interrupter gear and armour plating led to an ongoing see-saw of air superiority between each side, resulting in periods of high casualties such as 'Bloody April' 1917.⁹ Despite the many advances in aviation this competition spurred, the conflict's use of aerial bombing held greater sway over European society.

⁶ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); David Welch, *Persuading the People: British Propaganda in World War II* (London: The British Library, 2016).

⁷ Arthur uses an officially-produced publicity photograph of a bomber Pilot and Second Pilot, included as Figure 2.9. 'The pilot and co-pilot in the cockpit of an RAF Wellington bomber' in Max Arthur (ed.), *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War* (London: Ebury Press, 2004) p. 219.

⁸ Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton University Press, 2002) p. 19

⁹ For further information on 'Bloody April', see Peter Hart, *Bloody April: Slaughter in the Skies Over Arras, 1917* (London: Cassell, 2007).

By 1916, the fears of many both in Britain and continental Europe had been realised with the widespread application of aerial bombing on an unprecedented scale. In Britain, this ominous threat was popularly demonised in the form of the Zeppelin airship. Although technologically outdated and soon replaced in front-line service with fixed-wing aircraft, Zeppelins had a significant impact on the British public and its relationship with the broader conflict. Zeppelins' fearmongering power did not lie solely in their hit-and-miss tactics. Britain's woefully inadequate aerial defences, born out of a longstanding reliance on naval power, resulted in an equally woeful defensive capability against the vulnerable airships. These defences' poor success rate led to the British public perceiving the ominous-looking Zeppelins as invulnerable. The widespread tangible relief felt when Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson destroyed the first Zeppelin over Britain in September 1916 is evidenced by his controversial award of the Victoria Cross for his action.¹⁰ The sight of a later Zeppelin's destruction over London was greeted by "a hoarse shout of mingled execration, triumph and joy... from all parts of the metropolis, ever increasing in triumph and joy", evidencing aerial warfare's influence over public morale.¹¹ The newly-founded Department of Information, later elevated to cabinet level as the Ministry of Information (MoI), utilised both the positive and negative aspects aerial warfare. Britain's propagandists attempted, with limited success, to use the Zeppelins as motivators for recruitment, morale-raising, and industrial production by utilising the public's intense reactions to the airships.¹² Simultaneously, the RAF's fighter pilots were imbued with noble characteristics through stories of their duels high above the squalor of the trenches, and fighter 'aces' such as Albert Ball overwhelmed by the attention they received.¹³

By 1918, although fixed-wing bomber technology had long left airships behind, the threat posed to still-poorly defended Britain remained strong enough to spur the formation of the independent RAF from the Army and Navy's air services.¹⁴ Indeed, bombers had increased in capability to such an extent that British forces occupying Germany discovered plans and

¹⁰ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994) p. 290.

¹¹ Michael MacDonagh, 'The End of Zeppelin L31, 1 October 1916', in John Carey (ed.), *The Faber Book of Reportage* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987) p. 467.

¹² For information on Britain's propaganda use of Zeppelins, see Leon Bennett, *Churchill's War Against the Zeppelin 1914-18: Men, Machines and Tactics* (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2015).

¹³ William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009) p. 380. For further information on the RFC and RAF's use in British propaganda, see Liam Barnsdale, 'Lionhearts and "Glamour Boys": British Pilots in British Propaganda During the First and Second World Wars', History Honours 489 Dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington, 2017.

¹⁴ Peter Gray, 'British Air Power from Potential to Fully Fledged Service, 1914-45', *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 159, No. 4, 4 July 2014, p. 39.

components of an unprecedentedly-large bomber. With Wooden undercarriage wheels more than two metres in diameter, the ‘Poll Giant Triplane’ was theorised to be designed with the intention of bombing American cities from Germany.¹⁵ In the space of three years, aircraft had developed from the novelty pastimes of a handful of enthusiasts to ruggedly-designed, mass-produced machines capable of travelling halfway across the globe.

After the First World War’s rapid technological advances, the interbellum period allowed for the translation of military aviation technologies such as metal airframes and aerial photography into civil practice, allowing aircraft to open parts of the globe hitherto inaccessible by ship.¹⁶ Simultaneously, aviators captured the imagination of an admiring public through air shows and races, pushing the boundaries of both the geographically and scientifically known world.¹⁷ Depictions of aviators as heroes in fiction also came to rise in popularity, with books and films such as W.E. Johns’ *Biggles* series and Howard Hughes’ *Hell’s Angels* redefining the wartime and peacetime aviator as a romantic adventurer, solitarily braving the dangerous new world of aviation.¹⁸

‘Air-mindedness’ ran rife throughout British society, with the capabilities of aircraft in civilian, governmental and military roles touted by a select number of political campaigners. Among these campaigners was Lord Montagu, whose fierce promotion of aviation’s potential in imperial policing was indicative of changing approaches to imperialism and society as a whole. Targeting low-level governmental agencies and public fundraisers, Montague argued that a handful of aircraft could replace entire infantry divisions in patrolling frontiers.¹⁹ In this interbellum spirit of social, political, cultural and technological revolution that Eric Hobsbawm

¹⁵ One of these wheels is held in the Imperial War Museum London, ‘Wheel, undercarriage, Poll Giant Triplane, German’, 1918, Ref. No. AIR 290, Imperial War Museums Collections.

¹⁶ For examples of RAF promotional material using their global reach and role in aerial exploration, see ‘See the World With the Royal Air Force’, May 1920, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 0335, Imperial War Museums Collections; ‘RAF Link Empires Far Flung Colonies’, 16 April 1932, British Movietone News (accessed on www.aparchive.com, Ref. No. BM1763).

¹⁷ For examples of this widespread popularity, see ‘RAF Pageant “The Thrill of the Year”’, 18 June 1928, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com Ref. No. 730.2); ‘RAF Squadron Gets Ready for Pageant’, 25 May 1933, British Movietone News (accessed on www.aparchive.com Ref. No. BM2406); ‘Sultan of Muscat at RAF Display’, 15 October 1928, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com Ref. No. 2333.09). For an example of the publicity afforded to, and popularity of Amy Johnson, British interwar pioneer aviator, see “‘More Wonderful than Ever ... Amy”’, 22 December 1932, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com Ref. No. 689.11).

¹⁸ For an example of a Biggles book from this era, see W.E. Johns, *Biggles in France* (London: The Boys’ Friend Library, 1935); Howard Hughes, *Hell’s Angels* (United Artists, 1930).

¹⁹ Michael Collins, ‘A Technocratic Vision of Empire: Lord Montagu and the Origins of British Air Power’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 26 July 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2017.1353259> p. 2.

termed “the world revolution”, military air arms across the world changed their purpose and appearance.²⁰ The RAF’s aircraft shed their drab wartime paint schemes, replaced by silver complemented by bright unit-specific colours to impress and inspire spectators at the frequent ‘air pageants’.

Owing to air arms’ peacetime repurposing, military aviation technology stagnated during the interbellum period. Until the mid-1930s, fabric-covered biplanes with open cockpits remained in favour, despite metal airframe materials such as Duralumin having been used in Germany during the First World War, and promoted as early as 1919 in *Flight* magazine.²¹ Despite aviation’s new peacetime image, however, the memory of the damage done by aircraft during the previous war continued to plague the consciences of Europe’s political elite. In a 1932 address to the House of Commons, Stanley Baldwin, later British Prime Minister, ominously declared that “the bomber will always get through”, and aerial bombing would inevitably be the most destructive and decisive factor in any future war.²² Although his statement predated the internationally-contentious bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, Baldwin was by no means alone in his fears. Between 1934 and 1935, nearly 12 million Britons signed the ‘Peace Ballot’, affirming their commitment to the League of Nations’ disarmament policies.²³ By 1939, in the wake of the Spanish Civil War and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, renewed awareness of aerial bombardment’s destructive power extended well beyond a political minority.²⁴

The competing perspectives of glamour and fear came to a head upon the outbreak of the Second World War. Frenzied by the fear of aerial bombardment and spurred by their government’s dire warnings, civilians throughout Britain prepared for the worst. Air raid shelters were dug, windows taped, and doorways sandbagged.²⁵ Britain’s public adjusted to the

²⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995) p. 54.

²¹ A.P. Thurston, ‘Metal Construction of Aircraft’, *Flight*, 22 May 1919, pp. 682-683.

²² Stanley Baldwin in David S. Sorenson, *The Politics of Strategic Aircraft Modernization* (Westport: Praeger, 1995) p. ix.

²³ For further analysis of the Peace Ballot’s political influence, see Martin Ceadel, ‘The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934-5’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 377, October 1980, pp. 810-839.

²⁴ For more information on the Guernica bombing’s impact on global perceptions of warfare, see Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). On the impact of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia on British politics, see Richard Pankhurst, ‘Pro- and Anti- Ethiopian Pamphleteering in Britain during the Italian Fascist Invasion and Occupation (1939-41)’, *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 Summer/Fall 2003, pp. 153-176.

²⁵ For an example of early-war encouragement for public air raid preparations, see ‘Your Home as an Air Raid Shelter’, 7 October 1940, Pathé Gazette, (accessed on www.britishpathe.com Ref. No. 1164.07); ‘Evacuating the Children’, 17 June 1940, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com Ref. No. 1047.30).

new conflict, and the nation's propagandists, woefully unprepared for war, struggled to control public perception of aerial warfare and those fighting it.

Methodology

An empirical approach to the subject of propaganda is taken in this thesis, constructed principally from close textual analyses of Second World War propaganda material depicting aviators across multiple media. This method is utilised in opposition to other authors' methodologies of analysing a single medium, such as S.P. Mackenzie's work on wartime cinema or Jane Chapman, Anna Hoyles, Andrew Kerr and Adam Sherif's on cartoons.²⁶ Although these works allow more incisive examinations of these depictions' use, they are limited by their source range to a fractional history. Examining examples from across multiple media allows a broader examination of aviators' propaganda representations, opening the investigation to analyse the impacts of varying creators, influences and audiences. The primary advantage of this method, however, lies in its ability to reveal the extent of these images' distribution, and the changing use of their individual components both over time and across different media.

To determine appropriate primary source material, this thesis adopts Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell's definition of propaganda from their book *Propaganda and Persuasion*. This definition states that it "is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."²⁷ For the sake of limiting this thesis's scope, only sources either created, contributed to, or susceptible to manipulation by the British Government or any of its subsidiary organisations are treated as propaganda. Primary among these subsidiary organisations, owing to their contributions to the propagandisation of the RAF and its personnel, are the MoI, AM, together with the RAF's Fighter Command (FC) and Bomber Command (BC). Accordingly, owing to the influence of these groups, all material produced with official approval during the Second World War under the MoI's censorship purview is deemed propaganda. For example, all feature films produced in Britain during the conflict were

²⁶ S.P. MacKenzie, *British War Films 1939-1945: The Cinema and the Services*, rev. ed. (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2001); Jane Chapman, Anna Hoyles, Andrew Kerr, & Adam Sherif, *Comics and the World Wars: A Cultural Record* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

²⁷ Garth Jowett & Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 4 ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006) p. 7.

released subject to the approval of the MoI's offshoot, the British Board of Film Censorship.²⁸ Accordingly, all wartime feature films produced or released in Britain were either tailored or edited to comply with the MoI's propaganda aims, making them, by this author's definition, propaganda. Any sources that fall outside of this definition are instead categorised and utilised as representations of public opinion or reality, depending on the creator.

To distinguish between domestically- and internationally-distributed material, sources that meet David Welch's definition of psychological warfare is excluded from this thesis's parameters for propaganda.²⁹ Welch's distinction lies in the material's target audience, with propaganda aimed at distribution within one's country, whereas psychological warfare is targeted at enemy audiences.³⁰ To avoid the complications of Britain's ever-changing diplomatic relations with allied, neutral and enemy nations, this thesis will focus purely on propaganda distributed within the United Kingdom, with occasional references made, where relevant, to internationally-targeted material. Furthermore, owing to the limitations of available sources and to remove any possibility of confusion, propaganda material distributed at a national level throughout Britain is primarily used, and the "audience" is therefore taken as the entire British public, unless otherwise specified. Therefore, throughout the thesis, primary source material is divided into three groups based on their creators and time of creation: propaganda, public opinion, and reality. Material that fits into this thesis's definition of propaganda is categorised as such, while sources that were produced during wartime but not directly influenced by a British government agency are deemed representations of public opinion. Finally, testimonies given by, or relating to, RAF Second World War aviators either in private, such as letters or diaries, or after the conflict's end, are considered insight into reality. Each of these three abstract spheres influenced each other, and their interplay is utilised to demonstrate the influence of RAF aviators' propaganda representations on their audience, and thereby their effectiveness as propaganda.

Being an empirical analysis, this thesis examines primary sources from across multiple media, including officially-produced and -released photographs of aviators and newspaper articles and advertisements such as the AM's 'Fly With the RAF' series.³¹ Motion pictures also make significant contributions, primarily in the form of newsreels stories produced by

²⁸ Nicholas Pronay, 'Britain' in Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert & David Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003) p. 51.

²⁹ David Welch, *Propaganda: Power and Persuasion* (London: The British Library, 2016) p. 38.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 15 January 1941, *The Times*, p. 6.

numerous companies such as Pathé and Movietone, and feature films ranging in origin from the RAFFPU's *Journey Together* (Boulting, 1945) to AM-supported and MoI-approved *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*.³² Posters are also included throughout, produced by numerous government agencies ranging from the AM's 'Reserved Men! Change Your Overalls for Flying Kit' to the MoI's 'Keep Mum – She's Not so Dumb!' series.³³ Similarly, extracts from books are used as evidence of both reality and propaganda. Aviators' post-war memoirs such as Roald Dahl's *Going Solo* reveal the realities of their lives and work, while officially-sanctioned memoirs published during the conflict such as Richard Hillary's *Fighter Pilot* are used alongside His Majesty's Stationary Office-published books such as *Bomber Command* as examples of propaganda.³⁴ Similarly, wartime radio broadcasts delivered by such aviators, scripted and approved by the MoI, AM, and relevant RAF Commands, will be used as examples of propaganda, and their descriptions of combat and characterisations of aviators treated accordingly.

The primary sources used in this thesis were taken from numerous archives, museums, libraries and collections. National museum collections such as the Air Force Museum of New Zealand and Royal Air Force Museum, London provided official printed material such as posters, books and newspaper articles, as well as personal correspondence between governmental department heads, and aviators writing to their families. The RAF Museum also provided the author with a fascinatingly-insightful file of press releases produced by FC's 11 Group and approved by FC, the AM and MoI. As well as supplying photographs, films and posters, the Imperial War Museums worked in conjunction with the British Library's access to the BBC Archive in providing recordings of radio broadcasts delivered by RAF aviators. Providing useful evidence of aviators' representations in this highly-influential medium, these recordings also balanced this thesis's largely-visual focus. Visual sources came in a wide range of forms, including the material provided by museum collections, but featuring most prominently of all throughout this thesis are newsreels. These were produced by subsidiaries of numerous commercial cinema corporations using MoI-provided footage for screening in their owners' cinemas across Britain, making them, despite their appearance of non-

³² John Boulting, *Journey Together* (Royal Air Force Film Production Unit, 1945); Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (The Archers, 1942).

³³ 'Reserved Men! Change Your Overalls for Flying Kit', 1939-1945, Ref. No. FA10774, Royal Air Force Museum Archive; 'Keep Mum - She's Not So Dumb! - Careless Talk Costs Lives', 1942, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 4095, Imperial War Museums Collections.

³⁴ Roald Dahl, *Going Solo* (London: Penguin Books, 1986); Paul Richie, *Fighter Pilot* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1941), Air Ministry, *Bomber Command* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1941).

governmental impartiality, black propaganda.³⁵ These newsreels were accessed on two digital archives: British Pathé, containing material produced by Pathé Gazette, Gaumont British News, and British Paramount, and the Associated Press Archive, holding the British Movietone News collection. While the Imperial War Museums holds a collection of ‘War Pictorial News’ reels, targeted at overseas audiences, and the RAF’s self-produced and internally-distributed newsreel ‘The Gen’, neither of these fit this thesis’s definition, and so are not included as examples, of propaganda. Unless otherwise stated, every newspaper article and advertisements referenced or quoted were accessed through their online archives, principally the Times Digital Archive and Illustrated London News Historical Archive. Both collections proved invaluable in this thesis’s construction, providing numerous examples of printed propaganda for analysis.

Despite the author’s best efforts, many relevant primary sources could not be utilised in this thesis. In many cases, this was due to their inaccessibility, with films such as *Dangerous Moonlight* (Hurst, 1941) and *The Big Blockade* (Freund, 1942) not available for full viewing in New Zealand.³⁶ Others such as the many aviation-related board games, toys and novels at the Museum of Brands in London, while both useful and accessible, simply could not be analysed and exploited to their fullest extent within the confines of this thesis’s length.³⁷ The choice of the primary sources used in this thesis was also dependent upon their availability and relevance to the work’s topic. Accordingly, many sources that provided interesting information but were not directly relevant to this topic, such as the ‘This Month’s Prunery’ articles in the AM magazine *Tee Emm*, were not included for analysis.³⁸

Literature Review

This thesis fills a gap in the present secondary literature concerning the examination of RAF aviators’ propaganda depictions. Works on the history of the RAF by authors such as Roy

³⁵ Luke McKernan, ‘Film (Newsreels)’ in Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert & David Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003) p. 132

³⁶ Brian Desmond Hurst, *Dangerous Moonlight* (RKO Pictures, 1941); Charles Freund, *The Big Blockade* (Ealing Studios, 1942).

³⁷ Examples include the board game ‘Aerial Attack’, 1939-1945, Ilex Series; the model ‘Spitfire II to Scale 1/72’, 1940-1945 Timpo Toys; W.E. Johns’s book *Worrals of the W.A.A.F.* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1941).

³⁸ ‘This Month’s Prunery’ was a regular article in *Tee Emm* from March 1942 until the magazine’s discontinuation in March 1946, each gazetting anonymous aviators into the ‘Most Highly Derogatory Order of the Irremovable Finger’. The articles chastised aviators for potentially-fatal ignorance or errors in their flying by listing their sins under such scathing titles as “Conspicuous confidence in his compass” or “Penetrating Observance Plus Imagination”. ‘This Month’s Prunery’, March 1942, *Tee Emm*, p. 16 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London, Ref. No. Misc 21/11); ‘This Month’s Prunery’, March 1946, *Tee Emm*, p. 301 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London, Ref. No. Misc 21/50).

Conyers Nesbit, focus primarily on the aircraft used by the service, and spatially-broader but temporally-narrower works on aviation in the Second World War by authors such as Richard J. Overy, examine the logistics and politics behind the combatants' victories and defeats.³⁹ While informing their readers on the machinery and logistics of wartime aviation, neither address their role in propaganda. Accordingly, their primary value to this work is providing information to compare with propaganda sources, to determine the extent of their accuracy. This process is inestimably valuable when analysing primary sources claiming to provide accurate and recent depictions of specific events, such as newspaper articles and newsreel stories. Similarly, works such as Overy's provide valuable evidence for the contextual analysis of propaganda sources. By linking the primary evidence to Overy's examination of the broader political and strategic priorities, the evolution of RAF aviators' propaganda representations throughout war can be more efficiently charted.

Histories of specific locations and their role in aerial warfare are also used throughout this thesis, exemplified by Graham Wallace's on RAF Biggin Hill.⁴⁰ Although Wallace largely ignores the influences of propaganda and public opinion on the airfield and its personnel, he and his fellow authors provide useful insight into the aviators' activities and their changing environments. Additionally, contributions are made by more recent books on individual experiences of Second World War aviation. These works often take the form of personal narrative compilations, best exemplified by the Imperial War Museums' *Forgotten Voices* series.⁴¹ Other authors, such as Patrick Bishop, have worked these personal testimonies into a cohesive narrative, arguing for the improved appreciation of the air war's impact on those involved.⁴² The aforementioned books all have their limitations, however, with many aviation histories utilising material created for propaganda purposes as untampered primary sources. Great care is required when using these works for contextual analysis, therefore, as despite plentiful opportunities, none examine the depiction of aviators in their nations' propaganda. Bishop comes closest to the topic in his outlining of the interactions between bomber crewmen and journalists.⁴³ However, this is largely restricted to a brief overview of risks journalists took

³⁹ Roy Conyers Nesbit, *An Illustrated History of the R.A.F.*, 3 ed. (Godalming: Colour Library Books, 1991); Richard J. Overy, *The Air War: 1939-1945*, 3 ed. (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005).

⁴⁰ Wallace, Graham, *RAF Biggin Hill* (London: Tandem, 1969).

⁴¹ For an example, see Max Arthur (ed.), *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War* (London: Ebury Press, 2004).

⁴² Patrick Bishop, *Bomber Boys: Fighting Back, 1940-1945* (London: Harper Press, 2007).

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 145-148.

by taking part in operations and the RAF airmen's impressions on said journalists, all without analysis of the resulting reports' propaganda influences.

To complement works on aviation history, literature examining the broader themes and theories of propaganda contribute to this thesis. Jowett & O'Donnell and Welch were of particular use in providing this thesis's propaganda definition.⁴⁴ Welch often betrays his national bias through discussions of "our" bombing of Germany and the way "we" destroyed cities.⁴⁵ However, his examinations of propaganda themes and methods throughout history provide valuable insight when examining the temporal shifts in aviators' propaganda depictions. In each of these sources, aviators and aviation are simply used as exemplars of propaganda themes and campaigns, omitting in-depth analyses of their changing use for the sake of broader thematic arguments. To provide more era- and source-specific information, works on individual media are used, including Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards' on British wartime cinema.⁴⁶ Although Aldgate and Richards only examine a select number of films as exemplars of specific propaganda themes, their research into these films' reception by British and global audiences is highly beneficial for contextual analysis. Aldgate and Richards also provide valuable insight into their selected films' production, enabling the components of these films' aviator depictions to be traced back to the filmmakers and influencing agencies. However, these authors' valuable insights come at the cost of close textual analysis. Aldgate & Richards merely summarise their films' plots before examining, in significant depth, the audience and critical responses they received upon their release.⁴⁷

As this thesis examines the propagandisation of clothing and uniforms, works on these subjects are utilised where relevant. Despite their lack of engagement with propaganda's interactions with these aspects, authors' arguments on relevant objects' backgrounds, creation, and relation to contemporary fashion provide useful contextual information. These works include those on European fashion and the societal impact of uniforms such as Jennifer Craik's *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*, Alan Mansfield and Phillis Cunnington's *Handbook of English Costume in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1950*.⁴⁸ Owing to

⁴⁴ Jowett, & O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2006); Welch, *Propaganda* (2013).

⁴⁵ Welch, *Persuading the People* (2016) p. 134.

⁴⁶ Anthony Aldgate & Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War*, 2 ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ Aldgate & Richards, *Britain Can Take It* (1994) pp. 282-286.

⁴⁸ Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Alan Mansfield, & Phillis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1950* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

the limited number of academic sources dedicated to the study of RAF Second World War uniforms and flying equipment, two sources are relied upon heavily to contextualise the realities of the service's clothing. These works are Graham Rood's journal article 'A Brief History of Flying Clothing' from the *Journal of Aeronautical History*, and Andrew Cormack's contribution to Osprey's Men-at-Arms series.⁴⁹ None of these works examine clothing's use in propaganda, instead investigating the influence of fashion and technological advancements on clothing. However, their differing fields, when combined, provide useful contributions for the contextual analysis of primary sources, primarily when examining propaganda sources emphasising the favourable traits of RAF uniforms and flying equipment.

Although no authors have yet written on the specific components of RAF aviators' propaganda depictions in Britain during the Second World War, several have written on subjects either covering an aspect of this topic or closely skirting it. Francis inspects the perception of RAF pilots in British society during the conflict, however he neglects the role of the nation's propagandists in cultivating this perception.⁵⁰ Instead, Francis focuses on the impact of direct interactions between aviator and public, and has a propensity in his primary source analyses to assume all media organisations were independent of government influence. This being said, Francis's insight into the social impact of aviators and the popularity of the messages spread by newspapers in Britain makes an invaluable contribution to this thesis, and the extent of his research aids greatly to its analyses.

Works devoted more specifically to aviation's place in wartime propaganda, although not specifically examining the components of aviators' depictions, also contribute significant amounts of information to this thesis. Garry Campion investigates the RAF's propagandisation during the Battle of Britain, however he primarily examines the broader themes and messages of the propaganda process, taking little interest in the specific details used when depicting aviators.⁵¹ A small number of authors examine representations of the Battle of Britain after the war, including MacKenzie, who scrutinises the depiction of RAF pilots in seven films and television shows from 1939 to 1991.⁵² However, of these primary sources, only two, *The Lion*

⁴⁹ Graham Rood, 'A Brief History of Flying Clothing', *Journal of Aeronautical History*, Vol. 2014 No. 01, May 2014, pp. 3-54; Andrew Cormack, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1990).

⁵⁰ Francis, *The Flyer* (2008).

⁵¹ Garry Campion, *The Good Fight: Battle of Britain Propaganda and the Few* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁵² S.P. MacKenzie, *The Battle of Britain on Screen: 'The Few' in British Film and Television Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

Has Wings and *The First of the Few*, were created during the conflict, limiting the work's contributory value to this thesis. To complement these analyses of broad thematic changes, works on the production of RAF-related wartime films are utilised. These histories include Keith Buckman's article on the Royal Air Force Film Production Unit (RAFFPU).⁵³ Buckman's work is comparatively narrow in chronological scope and focuses primarily on the Unit's work on *Journey Together* and other officially-produced films, arguing that the quality of its work surpassed contemporary governmental and non-governmental production companies.⁵⁴ However, Buckman skims over the RAFFPU's contributions to commercial ventures and newsreels, treating it as an insular organisation competing, rather than cooperating, with its commercial counterparts. However, when used in concert with the research of others such as K.R.M. Short and S.P. Mackenzie, whose works examine the AM's broader contributions to British wartime cinema, Buckman's work provides useful insight into the politics and creative methods behind the RAF and AM's film propaganda.⁵⁵

Through analyses of primary sources and alongside these secondary works, this thesis demonstrates the connections between the secondary sources' focuses, bridging the gap between social histories, military histories, clothing histories, media histories and propaganda histories. Due to limitations of size, this work cannot comprehensively analyse RAF aviators' representations in British Second World War propaganda. However, by analysing the most prevalent components of these representations, it is hoped that further research continues into this and similar topics.

Structure

This work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter examines the chronological changes in RAF aviators' propagandisation over the course of the Second World War. To simplify the process, the conflict is divided into three periods, and three samples of propaganda produced during each era examined as exemplars of their time. The representations of aviators in each of these sources are examined within the context of broader propaganda trends, and use of such communicative tools as language, cinematography and narration analysed. In doing so, this

⁵³ Keith Buckman, 'The Royal Air Force Film Production Unit, 1941-45', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1997, pp. 219-244.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 241.

⁵⁵ K.R.M. Short, *Screening the Propaganda of British Air Power: From R.A.F. (1935) to The Lion Has Wings (1939)* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1997); S.P. MacKenzie, 'On Target: The Air Ministry, RAF Bomber Command and Feature Film Propaganda, 1941-1942', *War & Society*, Vol. 15, No. 2, October 1997, pp. 43-59.

analysis reveals the changing appearance of the RAF aviator and its interactions with public opinion and political objectives. The second chapter narrows this investigation's focus to analyse selected visual symbols' repeated use in the creation of the RAF aviator's propaganda image. Items of uniform, flying clothing and insignia are identified within multiple propaganda sources, and their frequent use and emphasis by the Britain's propagandists highlighted to show the significance of these symbols in the creation of the RAF aviator's propaganda image. Following this, the focus is narrowed once again in Chapter three to examine the attribution of two principal characteristics, youthful vigour and informality, to the propagandised RAF aviator. These characteristics' varying applications and frequency of use are investigated, alongside analyses of their creation and impact on real RAF aviators. In this brief examination of these two attributes, the connection between image and personality are examined, and the delicate balance necessary in the application of characteristics to propaganda personas revealed.

Throughout this thesis, several terms are used to describe and categorise RAF personnel. The word 'aviator' refers to any person employed in flying capacities, qualified to work within an aircraft while in flight. 'Pilot' refers to someone employed in said role, responsible for their aircraft's primary controls. 'Aircrew' or 'crew' describe the groups of aviators working together in groups within a Bomber, cooperating between their separate roles such as pilot, Navigator, Air Bomber or Air Gunner (AG). Ranks are categorised under 'Officers', being personnel holding commissions from Pilot Officer to Air Chief Marshal, and 'Other Ranks', including all non-commissioned personnel ranking from Airman to Warrant Officer. Ranks worked independently from roles within the RAF, with both Officers and Other Ranks filling all aircrew roles.

Chapter One: Shifting Priorities

This chapter examines the evolution of RAF aviators' propaganda depictions, revealing the temporally-changing focuses of and methods used in their promotion by Britain's propagandists. In doing so, it sets the scene for the following chapters' analyses of specific techniques, components and traits, examining their changing use across the war's duration. To simplify this process, the Second World War is split into three sections. The first of these periods spans from Britain's entry into the war in September 1939 to the Battle of Britain over Summer and Autumn 1940. This was a time dominated by British Expeditionary Force's retreat from continental Europe, and what A.J.P. Taylor termed the "revolt" leading to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's replacement by Winston Churchill.¹ The period's political and military crises affected aviators' propagandisation, with governmental agencies' squabbling and the MoI's ignorance of public opinion reflected in their propaganda material. The second period covers the two years following the Battle of Britain, containing the MoI's reorganisation and the Britain's strategic uncertainty before the United States of America's (USA) entry into the war. The propagandised aviators of this era reflect the MoI and AM's changing priorities, attentiveness to public opinion, and production capabilities. The closing years of the war, 1943-1945, are examined in the final section, when the exponential growth of the RAF's bombing campaigns and Britain's improving strategic position strongly influenced RAF aviators' use in propaganda. These sections, although unequally weighted in distribution of years, have been divided based upon three factors: significant events in aerial warfare, the distribution of aviation-related propaganda, and the distinct shifts in aviators' propaganda representations. For example, after 1942, aviators only rarely appeared as the focus of propaganda, and so this three-year period has been condensed into a single section. Conversely, a dramatic shift in aviators' representation in propaganda is evident following the Battle of Britain, with the retrospectively-stilted "men with wings" of 1939 and early-1940, a term used by both propagandists and commercial advertisers, contrasting strikingly with the relaxed, regionally-diverse aviators of post-1940.² To analyse these eras' propaganda messages and processes, each section consists of three case studies of material produced during its respective period. Each case study represents one of three propaganda media, namely: newspapers, newsreels, and feature films. The representation of aviators in these examples are analysed and compared to produce a

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 477.

² 'RAF Fighters in Close Up', 7 October 1940, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1164.06); Burberrys, 'Uniform Comment...', 2 April 1940, *The Times*, p. 12.

summary of each period's focus and methods. For a comprehensive explanation of the analysed extracts, the original sources are commended to the reader.

The 'Phoney War' and the Battle of Britain

From the war's outbreak in September 1939 until the following October, the MoI and AM both struggled to adapt to the new conflict and its demands on their respective fields. Both ministries underwent multiple, rapid changes during this period, witnessing high turnovers in command. Hugh MacMillan, John Reith, and Alfred Duff Cooper all attempted to rescue the MoI's poor reputation during their brief tenures as Ministers, while Kingsley Wood, Samuel Hoare, and Archibald Sinclair all served for varying lengths of time as Secretaries of State for Air.³ During this turbulent period, propaganda promoting aviation and aviators varied widely in its message, tone, and composition. Newsreel stories contained smiling aviators entertaining dignitaries while "establishing complete supremacy over the enemy", as newspaper articles embellished AM communiqués claiming widespread destruction of German targets by RAF bombers.⁴ The two ministries' cooperative reporting of the air war to the British public was at best naïve, and at worst an outright fabrication. The three examples analysed in this section, 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', 'Cavalry of the Clouds' and *The Lion Has Wings* (Powell, Hurst & Brunel, 1939), exhibit the impact of this period's political upheaval on the depiction of aviators in propaganda.⁵

Printed recruitment propaganda was utilised extensively by Britain's AM during the war's early years. Targeting young males, these messages showcased the RAF as a uniquely enticing service, a necessity owing to the service's voluntary basis. Exemplifying these early works is the newspaper advertisement 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', two versions of which were published by *The Times* in September and October 1940. 'R.A.F. Want Volunteers for Flying Duties' consists entirely of written text, broken only by a small image of the RAF emblem at the very top of the piece. The solid block of written text that occupies the advertisement's majority is divided into sub-groups under the headings of 'Qualifications', "Rank and Pay", "Men who can volunteer", and "How to Apply". These are followed by two

³ Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) pp. 56-64.

⁴ 'Ministers with the RAF', 12 October 1939, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1023.51); 'Destructive Attacks by R.A.F.', 3 July 1940, *The Times*, p. 4.

⁵ Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', 10 October 1940, *The Times*, p. 2; 'Cavalry of the Clouds', 6 November 1939, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1027.17); Michael Powell, Brian Desmond Hurst & Adrian Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (London Films, 1939).

small italicised lines detailing where the reader can acquire a free booklet containing further information. The advertisement's construction emphasises the process required for the reader to become a pilot, with a limited explanation of the qualities required of a potential recruit. Although the October version features minor alterations from its September predecessor, such as the addition of the "Rank and pay" section and a re-worded opening sentence, the two incarnations of 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties' remain essentially similar in their construction and message.⁶ Neither contain any imagery aside from the RAF emblem, and the only disruption to the text-based format is the emphasis placed on headings through the use of larger, bolder fonts. With the addition of the new passage, the structure of the advertisement's later incarnation is divided into five individual messages, each contributing as individual reasons to a larger argument encouraging the reader to volunteer. First, the reader is told what roles are offered, with specific job titles and the expected age ranges of applicants listed. After this introduction the advertisement tells the reader who should apply for these roles. Ideal recruits are characterised as "fit, intelligent, and possess dash and initiative."⁷ By saying that these traits make a good aviator, the AM thereby casts all of the RAF's aviators in this light, implying their intention that the public view them as such. An argument for why the reader should join the RAF is then posed, with offers of a commission and the enticing statement that "pay is good".⁸ Finally, the reader is told "how to apply", with explicit directions for both categories of potential recruit.⁹

Typical of its age, produced at a time of MoI turmoil and AM strategic preoccupation, the advertisement makes no mention whatsoever of what a recruit can expect to do in the RAF. Aside from the vague attributes listed in the "qualifications" section, no examples of real or idealised pilots are even hinted at. This indicates the AM's belief that the advertisement's audience either knew enough about aviators' heroism to believe the occupation an alluring one, or believed that the information provided was enough to convince any potential recruits to apply. Given the advertisement's limited illustrative language, the first option is more likely, with 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties' intended to merely provide information to those already interested in joining the service. This conclusion is reinforced by the context of the advertisements' publication in the later stages of the Battle of Britain, when frequent articles

⁶ 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', 10 October 1940, *Times*, p. 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

detailing the RAF's illustrious exploits acted as ample incentive to *The Times*' readership.¹⁰ Indeed, aviation's presence in British public consciousness at this period of the war revealed in a wide range of sources, including a Mass Observation report produced on 8 May 1940, which found that at a Fulham children's library, "of the different services, the R.A.F. seems to have created the most interest."¹¹ Despite the interest of this demographic, Home Intelligence Reports from the same month often include instances of negative public opinion on the RAF, with statements such as "objection is taken to the way in which individual exploits of RAF pilots occupy most of the news time" appearing in late May 1940.¹² By August, however, Home Intelligence were reporting almost universally-positive feedback on the RAF and its activities. "The almost daily reports of Fighter Command's victories" were "generating a sense of euphoria", often offsetting the "disappointment" in the defeats suffered by the Army and Navy, such as the former's retreat in East Africa.¹³ Their popularity was often remarked upon by RAF aviators. Bob Doe, a Pilot Officer in 234 Squadron, was invited to a factory foreman's home for lunch in August 1940, during which Doe recalled the foreman's wife's remarks "made me blush", sparking the realisation that "ordinary people in the street knew what we were doing, and that they admired us."¹⁴ With such widespread popularity and fame, it is therefore assumed that despite the bland appearance of 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', aviators' illustrious reputation was adequately promoted elsewhere.

Although the RAF's fame was widespread at this time, many unofficial depictions and descriptions of its aviators differed vastly from 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', reflecting the MoI and AM's lack of public engagement. The glamour of the service and its members' rakish behaviour was well known by the end of 1940, and many organisations took advantage of this reputation to promote their aims. Notable among these were commercial advertisements for a wide variety of products, including Churchman's Cigarettes, three examples of which are included as Figure 1.1.¹⁵ Released in the same publication as 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', these advertisements characterise RAF aviators very

¹⁰ Welch, *Persuading the People* (2016) p. 128

¹¹ 'SH', Mass Observation Report No. 96: 'Children's Reading at Fulham Library', 8 May 1940, p. 2 (accessed on www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk).

¹² 'Tuesday 28 May 1940' in Paul Addison & Jeremy Crang (eds.), *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour May to September 1940* (London: Vintage Books, 2011) p. 46.

¹³ Paul Addison & Jeremy Crang 'Monday 12 August to Saturday 17 August 1940' in Addison & Crang (eds.), *Listening to Britain* (2011) p. 320; 'Wednesday 14 August 1940' in Addison & Crang (eds.), *Listening to Britain* (2011) p. 329.

¹⁴ Bob Doe, 'Pilot Officer Bob Doe 234 Squadron, RAF' in Max Arthur (ed.), *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War* (London: Ebury Press, 2004) p. 89.

¹⁵ Churchman's Cigarettes, 'Churchman's No. 1', 28 September 1939, *The Times*, p. 12; Ibid, 14 December 1939, p. 12; Ibid, 27 June 1940, p. 4.

differently from ‘R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties’, depicting them as relaxed despite their purposeful dress, and through December’s inclusion of a Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) member, flirtatious.¹⁶ This aviator differs vastly from the pilots who are “fit, intelligent, and possess dash and initiative” promoted by the AM around the same time, revealing a gulf between the propagandists’ messages and the public consciousness. It is unclear whether this resulted from ignorance or stubborn unwillingness to depict servicemen as anything but the purest ambassadors of their national ethos. What is clear, however, is that in the first two years of the Second World War, the AM and MoI were noticeably out of touch with their audience’s perception of RAF aviators.

[Images redacted in digital version]

Fig. 1.1. Churchman’s Cigarettes advertisements from September 1939, December 1939 and June 1940.¹⁷

The clean, noble characteristics attributed to RAF aviators by official sources, so strikingly different from those espoused by their unofficial contemporaries, are also found in a wide range of newsreels from the conflict’s early stages. ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’, produced by Pathé Gazette in November 1939, serves as a prime early-war example of this medium. Although released to the public nearly a year earlier than ‘R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties’, ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’ nevertheless gives the viewer a clear indication of how both

¹⁶ Churchman’s Cigarettes, ‘Churchman’s No. 1’, 28 September 1939, *The Times*, p. 12; Churchman’s Cigarettes, ‘Churchman’s No. 1’, 14 December 1939, *The Times*, p. 12; Churchman’s Cigarettes, ‘Churchman’s No. 1’, 27 June 1940, *The Times*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Ibid (accessed on The Times Digital Archive, supplied courtesy of Times Newspapers Limited).

the AM and MoI wished their audience to view their nation's aviators, with many of the newsreel's character tropes echoed in the later *Times* advertisement.¹⁸ Reporting on a visit of King George VI to an RAF airfield, the footage shows the King inspecting the resident personnel and aircraft, along with battle damage to a Bristol Blenheim bomber sustained in the recent "glorious... raid on the Kiel Canal, of which the whole Empire is proud".¹⁹ The King then proceeds to award medals to "five brave men of the Royal Air Force" who "risked their lives as if they were of small account in the service of their country."²⁰ As the pilots are shown individually receiving their awards, the narrator quotes "a famous statesman", romantically describing the RAF as "the knighthood of the war" and "the cavalry of the clouds".²¹ The story ends with footage of various aircraft flying over the camera in neat formation accompanied by the final lines of the quote, urging the viewers to "think of the chivalry of the air!"²²

Despite its poetic and grandiose narration, RAF aviators are depicted as one-dimensional characters throughout 'Cavalry of the Clouds', with none of them interviewed, and no information provided on them beyond the broad praises of their qualities. Evidencing the extent of this silence, none of the aviators are even named, despite the lavish praises heaped upon them and their work. This anonymity even extends to those being awarded medals by the King. The only detail given to the audience about the aviators or their actions is the brief statement that they "risked their lives as if they were of small account in the service of their country", a claim reinforced by lingering footage of the Bristol Blenheim's holed wing and shattered plexiglass turret.²³ All of this makes the aviators appear almost superhuman, with the poetic talk of the aviators' "chivalry", "nobility" and "daring" giving them the appearance as infallible, impeccable heroes, who in turn imbue their service and nation with a similar ethos.²⁴ These characteristics strongly resemble those attributed to the RAF's predecessors during the First World War, when, as summarised by Denis Winter, Britain's propagandists fêted RFC and Royal Naval Air Service aviators as "a handful of men... in a virgin medium, deeming to personify skill in arms, individual judgement and sustained ferocity in single combat".²⁵ The professionalism of these aviators and their dedication to their work is further emphasised

¹⁸ 'Cavalry of the Clouds', 1939, Pathé Gazette.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Denis Winter, *The First of the Few: Fighter Pilots of the First World War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983) p. 132.

through their attire, with aviators being inspected by the King in the story's early shots wearing flying equipment, a dress standard that in peacetime was of questionable suitability for a royal visit.²⁶ Regardless, the scene was not only filmed but remarked upon by the narrator, stating that aviators were "just back from flights over Germany."²⁷ In doing so, their informality and absence of ceremonial dress are not only excused, but promoted as evidence of the service's active participation in the war.

Similar to many newsreel stories of its age the film utilises a mix of recently-captured footage and material shot before the outbreak of hostilities, indicating the conflict between British propagandists' desires and available resources. Although the majority of the footage, particularly the segments showcasing battle damage on a Bristol Blenheim's wing and turret, were shot after the war's commencement, the first of the three short clips that close the story most likely originates from the interbellum period. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that the aircraft flying in 'vic' formation on the left of the shot are biplanes, possibly members of the Hawker Hart family. The aircraft in the centre are dual-engined monoplanes, similar to the Avro Anson or Airspeed Oxford. By this time, the Hawker Hart and its offspring had been relegated to training roles, separated from the frontline monoplanes such as the Blenheim. The congregation of these aircraft in the same location, formed in a neat formation, was therefore an unlikely occurrence during Second World War's first two months, and most likely occurred during a pre-war air pageant. This indicates the creators' desire to project an image of the RAF's power through its size, with the shortage of recently-captured material, due to the AM's preoccupation with strategic demands, necessitating the use of archival footage.

Shortly before the production of 'Cavalry of the Clouds', Britain's first dedicated propaganda film of the conflict, *The Lion Has Wings*, was released. Minister of Information Hugh Macmillan described *The Lion Has Wings* to the House of Commons as "an admirable film" and "a really fine show."²⁸ Michael Powell, one of its many directors, later called it "an outrageous piece of propaganda, full of half-truths and half-lies, with some stagy episodes which were rather embarrassing and with actual facts which were highly distorted".²⁹ Many distinguished personalities viewed the film shortly after its opening at the Leicester Square Theatre, with *The Times* reporting the King and Queen attending "the 4.30 performance" on 13 November, preceded by "a newsreel which showed the King recently decorating R.A.F.

²⁶ 'Cavalry of the Clouds', 1939, Pathé Gazette.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hugh MacMillan in 'The Ministry of Information', 26 October 1939, *The Times*, p. 4.

²⁹ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Methuen, 1987) p. 335.

men”.³⁰ From October 1939 to April 1940, the same newspaper published multiple positive reviews of the film, and frequently reported on its positive reception in a number of cities overseas.³¹ Although Simon MacKenzie argues that the film’s primary purpose was to allay public fears of bombing through depictions of Britain’s defence procedures, *The Lion Has Wings* also introduced the RAF’s soon-to-be-famous FC pilots to global audiences, framing them as the island nation’s first line of defence.³² In doing so, the film uniquely exemplifies these aviators’ propaganda image during the conflict’s first month. In a brief scene following a recreation of the Kiel Canal raid by RAF bombers, the narrator, Gaumont British’s E.V.H. Emmet, expounds upon the virtues of the RAF’s fighter defences.³³ Emmet describes “the organisation that exists to counter, and eventually to conquer, German bombing attacks” as consisting of “vast machines, fighters, interceptors, pursuit planes,” “men who will prove themselves worthy successors to the Great War aces”, “leaders who have the confidence of the rank and file, and men of experience.”³⁴ This short, simple narration accompanies a montage of shots showing aviators relaxing next to a tent, Figure 1.2, aircraft under maintenance, and the faces of various personnel, Figures 1.4 and 1.3.³⁵ Following this short passage, the narrator describes the RAF balloon barrage’s role in deterring German aircraft from low-level bombing.



Fig. 1.2. *The Lion Has Wings*: Pilots sit outside a tent.³⁶



Fig. 1.3. *The Lion Has Wings*: An RAF officer surveys his subordinates.³⁷

³⁰ ‘The King and Queen at a Cinema’, 14 November 1939, *The Times*, p. 5.

³¹ For examples, see ‘The Lion Has Wings’, 21 October 1939, *The Times*, p. 3; ‘The Lion Has Wings’ in Milan’, 29 April 1940, *The Times*, p. 5.

³² MacKenzie, *The Battle of Britain on Screen* (2007) p. 18

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁴ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1.4. *The Lion Has Wings*: Two of the four pilots singled-out in quick succession.³⁸

The scene bears numerous similarities to ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’, particularly in its echoing of First World War and interbellum narratives when describing RAF aviators. Despite the number of RAF personnel depicted and bombastically-promoted by the narrator, none are named or even described beyond vague adjectives.³⁹ Pristine uniforms feature prominently throughout, exemplified in Figure 1.3, reminding the viewer of the service’s well-dressed reputation, explored further in Chapter Two.⁴⁰ The narrator compares the depicted aviators to “[William] Leefe-Robinson and [Albert] Ball and [William] Bishop”, all First World War pilots fêted for their heroism and Victoria Cross recipients.⁴¹ Their inclusion implies that the contemporary RAF fighter pilots had not seen a significant amount of action to warrant praise of their own, with the filmmakers relying instead on the actions of their predecessors from the earlier conflict. In turn, this indicates that the names remained sufficiently famous for the British public to recognise them by surnames alone, indicating that the ‘air mindedness’ promoted by many powerful and influential figures such as Lord John Montague during the interwar period was taken as a success by the film’s writers.⁴² The white overalls worn by pilots throughout the scene, issued to aviators selected to perform in the interwar ‘air pageants’, further conform to these interwar narratives.⁴³ Intended only for use during said pageants, the uniforms were designed to work alongside their aeroplanes’ interbellum silver paint schemes to impress service’s elitism, order and cleanliness upon audiences. Their use in *The Lion Has Wings* indicates the creators’ desire to continue the RAF’s association with its peacetime ideals.

³⁸ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Michael Collins, ‘A Technocratic Vision of Empire: Lord Montagu and the Origins of British Air Power’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 26 July 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2017.1353259>.

⁴³ Graham Rood, ‘A Brief History of Flying Clothing’, *Journal of Aeronautical History*, Vol. 2014 No. 01, May 2014, p. 21.

The characters' postures, however, reflect a burgeoning trend towards depicting RAF aviators in informal situations, examined further in Chapter Three, and the constraints of the film's production process. Their depiction wearing dirty overalls, relaxing outside a tent in Figure 1.2, and later standing casually in 1.4 all conform to this trend, reflecting reality of the aviators themselves. The pilots and aircraft depicted were of 74 'Tiger' Squadron based at RAF Hornchurch at the time of production in late 1939, nicknamed after their tiger head emblem.⁴⁴ Despite the sincere expressions of the Squadron's pilots in Figure 1.4, Pilot Officer D. 'Sammy' Hoare recalled the visit of Powell's film crew as "a very entertaining week" with "lots of beer flowing".⁴⁵ Hoare and his fellow members of the Squadron's 'B' Flight enjoyed the experience, but the event was "rather frowned upon by 'A' Flight who were seriously concentrating on their training at the time, while we were just flying around for the fun of it."⁴⁶ The manner of this scene's creation, with a week of filming followed by editing the acquired footage into a loose narrative, sharply contrasts with the studio-filmed material used in the recreation of the Kiel Canal raid, both methods and scenes being affected by the film's production time of "less than a month".⁴⁷

In all three examples analysed in this section, RAF aviators are given only a handful of characteristic traits, if any at all. Although ideas of youthful virility and intelligence are briefly expounded in 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', both 'Cavalry of the Clouds' and *The Lion Has Wings* promoted romanticised images of aviators, grounded in First World War and interbellum narratives, with duty and solemnity reigning above all other attributes. These one-dimensional representations, devoid of individuality, emotion, personality or eccentricity, present very different images from those espoused in coincidental commercial advertisements. This difference exemplifies the gulf between the MoI's messages and its audience's beliefs, a struggle characteristic of the period.⁴⁸

After "Their Finest Hour"

Following their rise to stardom in the Battle of Britain, and with the MoI's reorganisation and re-focusing under a succession of Ministers, aviators were included more frequently across all propaganda media. The MoI's reorganisation paralleled the AM's increasing dedication to

⁴⁴ MacKenzie, *The Battle of Britain on Screen* (2007) p. 13; Graham Wallace, *RAF Biggin Hill* (London: Tandem, 1969) p. 178.

⁴⁵ D. Hoare in MacKenzie, *The Battle of Britain on Screen* (2007) p. 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Powell, *A Life in Movies* (1987) p. 335.

⁴⁸ Welch, *Persuading the People* (2016) p. 15.

publicising the RAF's activities. As Simon MacKenzie put it, "successive chiefs at the Ministry of Information, even when annoyed, noted that the Air Ministry was more publicity conscious than other service departments", earning it the nickname of "Royal Advertising Force" among its Army and Navy contemporaries.⁴⁹ Newspaper articles, war artists such as Cuthbert Orde, radio reports, and newsreels all sang the praises of Churchill's "few", glamorising them as Britain's heroically-rakish saviours.⁵⁰ With the RAF's aviators in the full glare of the public eye following their victory, propagandists made their representations deeper and more closely-tied to reality. Printed propaganda material made greater use of images, and, by catering to their imagination with illustrative language, grabbed and arrested the viewer's attention more effectively. Simultaneously, representations of aviators in film became increasingly individualised. Regionally-diverse backgrounds and accents came to the fore across media, contributing to the MoI's broader message of a diverse, yet united, "people's war" effort.⁵¹ This section explores the development of this rejuvenated aviator image through the newspaper recruitment advertisements 'Fly with the RAF', newsreel story 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England' and feature film *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (Powell & Pressburger, 1942).

Shortly after the publication of 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', the AM released a series of newspaper advertisements entitled 'Fly with the RAF' across a range of newspapers including *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, and *Illustrated London News*.⁵² In his book *The Good Fight: Battle of Britain Propaganda and the Few*, Garry Campion examines a single 'Fly with the RAF' advertisement as an exemplar of Battle of Britain-era propaganda.⁵³ However, by treating the exemplar as a lone advertisement and eschewing the remaining instalments in the long series, Campion missed a valuable opportunity. Through comparative analysis, the series reveals the evolution of the RAF aviator's propaganda image from November 1940 to July 1941 at the height of the RAF's fame. To avoid confusion, the series' instalments are henceforth referred to by the date of their publication in *The Times*.

Whereas its predecessor was composed almost entirely of written information on the recruitment process, each instalment of 'Fly with the RAF' devoted a significant amount of

⁴⁹ MacKenzie, *British War Films 1939-1945* (2007) pp. 61-62.

⁵⁰ 'The Face of the Fighter Pilot: Victors of the Battle of Britain', 19 April 1941, *The Illustrated London News*, pp. 518-519; Winston Churchill, 'The First Year of the War ("The Few")', 20 August 1940, The International Churchill Society (accessed on www.winstonchurchill.org).

⁵¹ Welch, *Propaganda* (2013) p. 102.

⁵² For examples, see Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 22 January 1941, *The Times*, p. 6; Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 31 December 1940, *The Daily Mail* p. 3; Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 7 December 1940, *The Illustrated London News*, p. 743.

⁵³ Campion, *The Good Fight* (2009) p. 208.

room to an image of either an aviator, exemplified by the 27 May 1941 edition, or their activities, as in the 13 June 1941 version, both in Figure 1.5.⁵⁴ Accompanying these images were captions that either told imaginative stories relating the image to the RAF's ethos and aims, or simply expounded on the qualities of the ideal pilot. Initially, these captions bore a strong resemblance to the messages promoted in 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', with the first in the series, published on 18 November 1940, simply re-wording the earlier advertisement's sections in a slightly more energetic tone. This resemblance is best exemplified by the advertisement's opening statement:

Here's the chance you've been waiting for – to fly with the R.A.F.! Be a pilot (age 18-30), Air Observer (18-32) or Wireless Operator Air Gunner (18/32). The rapidly expanding Royal Air Force calls for volunteers NOW!⁵⁵

For comparison, the opening statement of 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties' reads:

The Royal Air Force, now rapidly expanding, invites young men to apply for training and service as

PILOTS (Age 18-30) AIR OBSERVERS (18-32)
WIRELESS OPERATOR AIR GUNNERS (18-32)⁵⁶

Not only are each passage's contents similar, but the language and content of each advertisement's individual sentence strongly resemble a counterpart in the other, exemplified by the bracketed age ranges for applicants and emphasis on the RAF's "rapidly expanding" size.⁵⁷ It is clear, therefore, that the 'Fly with the RAF' campaign began as an evolution of existing propaganda material, rather than a revolutionary run of entirely original work.

In subsequent versions, the structure and language used in 'Fly with the RAF' became more active. The advertisements' written components changed from brief overviews of entrance requirements to short stories tailored to accompany increasingly eye-catching, inspirational images, speaking to the reader's sense of adventure. The caption for the 3 January 1941 edition serves as an example, praising the "younger men" who "are forcing the pace of the war" and "striking with deadly precision" thanks to their "initiative" and "personal

⁵⁴ Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 20 March 1941, *The Times*, p. 3; Ibid, 13 June 1941, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 18 November 1940, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties', 10 October 1940, *The Times*, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly With the RAF', 18 November 1940, *The Times*, p. 3.

qualities”.⁵⁸ Reinforcing this illustrative prose, the passage’s second half directly addresses the reader, asking “if you are a younger man not yet called up for service – ask yourself, can *I* do this job too? If you can, there is a fighter or bomber for you, a part in our great offensive.”⁵⁹ These captions’ increasing energy was mirrored in their accompanying images, with 13 June 1941’s, Figure 1.5, accompanying an artist’s impression of a German bomber in a fighter aircraft’s gunsight, encouraging the reader to “look at the war this way”.⁶⁰ The message emphasises that “this is the role for the man who relishes a scrap above the clouds – who knows that in air war, individual daring, tenacity and self-reliance count above all.”⁶¹ The striking difference between these captions and that of ‘R.A.F. Wants Volunteers for Flying Duties’ clearly shows the AM’s changing attitudes towards recruitment and propaganda. Information on recruitment is supplemented by entertainment, encouraging audience engagement by drawing them into a story. This follows a broader contemporary trend in the MoI’s propaganda techniques, exemplified by the Ministry’s increasing investment in film production.⁶²

[Images redacted in digital version]

Fig. 1.5. Illustrations from four ‘Fly with the RAF’ incarnations, left to right: 20 March 1941, 13 June 1941, 27 May 1941 and 16 July 1941.⁶³

All of these examples encourage ideals of youthful energy and tenacity in the form of a tantalising story, rather than simply providing information on recruitment eligibility. An increasing engagement with public opinion is also reflected in the use of images and imagery, aiding in the construction of a story, rather than simply showing three aviators disconnected from the caption, as in 18 November 1940’s edition.⁶⁴ Engagement with public perception is

⁵⁸ Air Ministry Information Bureau, ‘Fly With the RAF’, 3 January 1941, *The Times*, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 13 June 1941, p. 6.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Welch, *Propaganda* (2013) p. 104.

⁶³ Extract from Air Ministry Information Bureau, ‘Fly with the RAF’, 20 March 1941, *The Times*, p. 3; Ibid, 27 May 1941, p. 6; Ibid, 16 July 1941, p. 3 (accessed on The Times Digital Archive, supplied courtesy of Times Newspapers Limited).

⁶⁴ Ibid, 18 November 1940, p. 3.

also noticeable in the similarities between the depictions of aviators in ‘Fly with the RAF’ and those in commercial advertisements. One exemplary similarity exists between the smiling, smoking, bulkily-clad aviator depicted in ‘Fly with the RAF’'s May 1941 incarnation, Figure 2.10, and those used by Churchman's Cigarettes, Figure 1.1.⁶⁵ Finally, although the majority of these advertisements utilised representations of pilots and their work to encourage the reader to become a pilot themselves, many of the later instalments are noticeable for their promotion of non-pilot aircrew roles. This reflects one of the strongest shifts in post-Battle of Britain propaganda, with the AM often diminishing the glory of pilots for the sake of promoting non-pilot aircrew roles, as seen in the 27 May and 16 July 1941 versions, Figure 1.5.⁶⁶ This promotion of aircrew roles continued throughout the war, with the RAF going so far as to produce an entire film, *Journey Together* (Boulting, 1945), fêting Navigators as irreplaceable members of aircrew.⁶⁷ The rapidity of this shift from pilot to aircrew is uniquely distinct in ‘Fly with the RAF’, changing from one to the other over a matter of weeks in May 1941.⁶⁸

This new wave of printed propaganda was accompanied by a renewed promotion of aviators in newsreels. Exemplifying this trend is the newsreel story ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’, produced and distributed by Pathé in August 1941. The Story begins by showing “the grand fellows of a New Zealand fighter squadron” standing outside gathered around their commander for a pre-flight briefing.⁶⁹ Panning panoramic shots of the group are mixed with close-ups of pilots listening intently to the speaker and shots of individual pilots conversing, as the narrator describes how “only the finest types of men are engaged on the biggest job of all.”⁷⁰ The pilots then walk away from the briefing before one is shown pulling on his parachute and climbing into the cockpit of his aircraft. Simultaneously, the narrator proclaims that “these are no mere untried youths” but “seasoned fliers who believe in their cause, each one determined to give the motherland his best.”⁷¹ The camera then follows six aircraft as they take off and then fly over as the narrator joyously announces their departure “on one of those flips which have shaken the German air force to its landing wheels” as “the hearts and thoughts of all true Britons go with them.”⁷² The story ends with a panning shot of

⁶⁵ Air Ministry Information Bureau, ‘Fly with the RAF’, 14 May 1941, *The Times*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 27 May 1941, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Boulting, *Journey Together* (1945).

⁶⁸ Air Ministry Information Bureau, ‘Fly with the RAF’, 27 May 1941, *The Times*, p. 6.

⁶⁹ ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’, 14 August 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1127.10).

⁷⁰ ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’, 1941, Pathé Gazette.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

several pilots smoking, talking and laughing as the narrator announces “the motherland says: thank you, boys, and thank you, New Zealand!”⁷³

Every frame of this newsreel was shot shortly before its release, as testified by the aviators’ equipment, indicating an improved newsreel production process since ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’. The pilots fly Spitfire Mark IIa aircraft, introduced to front-line squadrons in late 1940, and identifiable by their white rounded spinners housing either de Havilland or Rotol constant speed airscrews, and the dipole-wire-less radio antennas for T.R.1133 or T.R.1143 Very High Frequency sets.⁷⁴ Beneath their 1941 Pattern ‘Mae West’ lifejackets many wear War Service Dress uniforms, introduced in 1941, both items of clothing analysed in further detail in Chapter Two.⁷⁵ These pieces of equipment appear in every shot, proving that none of the footage was captured months or years before the ostensibly-recent story, as was the case in ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’ final shots. The ability for Pathé to create a story conforming to the MoI’s requirements using only recently-supplied AM footage testifies to a more efficient supply-and-demand relationship between all three parties, and the British propaganda machine’s new efficiency following its earlier difficulties.⁷⁶

In similar divergence from its predecessor, the use of the word “boys” to describe the New Zealand fighter pilots in the closing narration contrasts starkly with the romantic notions of mature knightly chivalry. This difference is all the more noticeable when one considers that the word “men” appears six times in the 1939 story’s narration. Adding to this new youthful image are the relaxed postures and actions of the depicted pilots, with the stiff, formal scenes replaced by shots of pilots chatting, strolling, smoking, smiling and laughing, often with one or two of their hands in their pockets.⁷⁷ These casual characteristics are further encouraged by the narration, with service slang such as “flips” and first-person narrative replacing bland informative statements and monotonous quotations, in accordance with the stylistic shift observed in ‘Fly with the RAF’.⁷⁸

⁷³ ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’, 1941, Pathé Gazette.

⁷⁴ Smith, *RAF Duxford* (2006) p. 80; Air Ministry, ‘Airscrew controls’ in ‘Pilot’s Notes: Spitfire IIA and IIB Aeroplanes’, Air Publication 1565B, Vol.1, Sect.1, Para.16; ‘Wireless Equipment, Transmitter-Receiver Type TR1133G and Case, British’, Imperial War Museums (accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections 21 January 2019).

⁷⁵ Cormack, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45* (1990) p. 40; Ibid, p. 5.

⁷⁶ For more on the RAFFPU’s expansion to increase newsreel footage production, see Buckman, ‘The Royal Air Force Film Production Unit’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1997, pp. 219-220, 222-223.

⁷⁷ ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’, 1941, Pathé Gazette.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

The theme of relaxation extends only a certain distance, however, as all of the depicted pilots are immaculately-groomed and their uniforms all appear clean and in good repair. Furthermore, the respectful attention they give to their leader during the initial briefing scene clearly shows that although their posture and actions are less formal than their predecessors' in 'Cavalry of the Clouds', they remain dedicated to their work. This emphasis on dedication to one's work was adapted and broadened beyond the military during the Second World War into the concept of the 'people's war'.⁷⁹ Despite their informality, therefore, the New Zealand aviators continue to serve as role models for the audience. The earlier story's formal depiction is attributable to its setting of a Royal visit, and therefore the stiff formality of the pilots depicted was natural in such circumstances. However, this situational difference in the two stories simply encourages the argument that RAF pilots were increasingly being depicted as casual. Both the AM and MoI, responsible for the production and distribution of RAF-related newsreel footage and therefore the basis for the entire story, chose to distribute this story's film as an appropriate depiction of New Zealand pilots in RAF service. Accordingly, an ostensibly normal occasion, without any event of significance, was considered in 1941 the worthy basis of a newsreel report. The depiction of aviators in a relaxed, everyday situation also promoted the 'people's war' message, encouraging audience familiarity and relatability with the story's subjects.⁸⁰ Similarly, the selection of a New Zealand squadron, not a British or unspecified unit, and the subsequent emphasising of its nationality and service for "the motherland", emphasises the Empire's dedication to 'Go Forward Together', as famously declared in numerous MoI posters.⁸¹

Despite these many differences, some similarities between the 'Cavalry of the Clouds' and 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England' are noticeable. In both, the pilots are depicted on an aerodrome in flying gear. This deliberate staging indicates a continued desire to project an image of active fliers in a working environment, be it "just back from flights over Germany" or "sweep[ing] the German Luftwaffe out of the skies".⁸² Both utilise strong imperialistic language and blur the definition between metropolitan Britain and its Commonwealth or Empire. The 1941 story states that "all true Britons" support the actions of the New Zealand

⁷⁹ Welch, *Propaganda* (2013) p. 102

⁸⁰ Welch, *Persuading the People* (2016) p. 89.

⁸¹ 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England', 1941, Pathé Gazette; 'Let us go Forward Together', 1939-1945, Ref. No. E.2145-1946, Prints, Drawings, & Paintings Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum; 'Come Then – Let Us to the Task', 1941, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 14838, Imperial War Museums Collections.

⁸² 'Cavalry of the Clouds', 1939, Pathé Gazette; 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England', 1941, Pathé Gazette.

pilots, after discussing their involvement only in the context of Commonwealth contribution, emphasising their “com[ing] all the way from their homeland”.⁸³ Similarly, ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’ refers to the Keil Canal raid, also dramatized in *The Lion Has Wings*, describing it almost offhandedly as an event “of which the whole Empire is proud”, after no previous mention of said Empire’s role in the war, or its connection to the British pilots depicted.⁸⁴ Although pilots’ propaganda images had undergone significant changes, projections of the RAF’s offensive capability and emphasis on Britain’s global allies retained their importance.

‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in Britain’ was one of many newsreel stories produced during 1941 by Pathé and its competitors promoting the RAF’s international composition. Some stories such as ‘First New Zealand V.C.’ promoted specific acts of heroism by individual aviators.⁸⁵ Many more stories, however, depicted entire squadrons or groups of commonwealth aviators either serving in, or joining, the RAF, exemplified by British Movietone’s ‘King and Queen with Empire Airmen’, analysed in Chapter Two.⁸⁶ Sharing this limelight were aviators from occupied nations serving in the RAF, most prominently members of the newly-formed Polish Squadrons, as in ‘Bomber Squadron of our Allies’, ‘Polish Airmen and Their President’, and ‘Battle Colours for Polish Airmen’.⁸⁷ All of Britain’s major newsreel production companies worked from the single supply of footage provided to them by the MoI, with stories featuring the same footage appearing in multiple companies’ newsreels.⁸⁸ This sudden and relatively-short-lived focus on foreigners was therefore a top-driven decision.

A similar international emphasis presents itself in radio, reinforcing the argument for its origins in the higher ranks of the MoI and AM. Examples of radio programmes promoting

⁸³ ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’, 1941, Pathé Gazette.

⁸⁴ ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’, 1939, Pathé Gazette.

⁸⁵ ‘First New Zealand V.C.’, 14 August 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1127.08).

⁸⁶ ‘King and Queen With Empire Airmen’, 30 October 1941, British Movietone News (accessed on www.aparchive.com, Ref. No. BM41507). For other examples of newsreel stories publicising groups of commonwealth aviators, see ‘Their Majesties and Airmen from Overseas’, 30 October 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1131.30); ‘Australian Air Force Grows’, 3 March 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1109.05); ‘A Sweep by an Australian Squadron’, 27 November 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1137.25).

⁸⁷ ‘Bomber Squadron of our Allies’, 24 March 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1109.42); ‘Polish Airmen and Their President’, 10 April 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1111.43); ‘Battle Colours for Polish Airmen’, 24 July 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1121.29).

⁸⁸ Luke McKernan, ‘Film (Newsreels)’ in Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert & David Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003) p. 133. For an example, see: ‘First New Zealand V.C.’, 1941, Pathé Gazette; ‘Raf New Zealander Sgt Ward Earns Victoria Cross’, 14 August 1941, Gaumont British News (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. VLVACLB501SE3SYFYN4OMI11D9YTB); ‘New Zealand Air VC’, 14 August 1941, British Movietone News (accessed on www.aparchive.com, Ref. No. BM41136).

the RAF's national diversity include the 1940 edition of the BBC's annual Christmas programme, one of the corporation's pre-war traditions, containing compilation of recordings from throughout the British Empire.⁸⁹ In 'Christmas under Fire', Australian flying-boat crews of Coastal Command (CC) are recorded opening letters with blatantly-scripted heavily-stereotyped cries of "good-oh", "strewth" and "how I'd like to be drinking a billy of tea up in the Dandenong Ranges", leaving the reader in no doubt as to their nationality.⁹⁰ Numerous MoI-approved interview scripts produced by the AM's Press and Publicity Branch, held in the RAF Museum's collections, attest to this message's origin among the higher levels of Britain's propaganda machine. One, intended for delivery by Flight Lieutenant (later Group Captain) Adolph Malan to an international audience, contained instructions ordering its delivery in Afrikaans.⁹¹ Another, written for American-born Flight Lieutenant James Davies and his interviewer, constantly reiterates Davies' origin despite his claim to be "British, all right", having returned to Wales with his Welsh parents when he was "18 or 19 years old".⁹²

The air war, and those fighting it, were of significant interest during 1941, as attested to by the coincidental shift to promoting the RAF's diversity and 'Fly With the RAF' campaign. The reason behind this is attributable to Britain's poor strategic position in the land and sea war. With the British Army see-sawing in the deserts of North Africa following their defeats in France and Greece, and the Royal Navy losing such famous ships as *Ark Royal* and *Prince of Wales* to submarine and aerial attack, the RAF alone possessed an ability to inflict tangible damage on Germany's war effort. Such was the RAF's strategic value as an offensive force that Winston Churchill ordered that the RAF "must therefore claim the first place over the Navy and Army" for munitions production, primarily to enable the growth of its aerial bombing campaigns.⁹³ To increase the effective use of these resources, the RAF relied heavily on contributions from the British Empire and Dominions. BC's Commander in Chief Arthur Harris estimated in his autobiography that by 1943, 37% of his Command's aircrew were supplied by "Dominion and Colonial Air Forces", 60% of these being Canadian.⁹⁴ However,

⁸⁹ Tom Hickman, *What did you do in the War, Auntie?: The BBC at War 1939-45* (London: BBC Books, 1995) p. 81.

⁹⁰ 'Christmas Under Fire', 25 December 1940, Ref. No. CL0068227, British Library.

⁹¹ 'Suggested Broadcast Script by F/Lt Malan, D.F.C., of 74 Squadron', 4 July 1940, in 'Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts', 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

⁹² 'Suggested Broadcast Script by F/Lt J.W.S. Davies, of 79 Squadron, American-Born Fighter Pilot', 15 June 1940, p. 1 in 'Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts', 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

⁹³ Winston Churchill, 'The Munitions Situation. Memorandum by the Prime Minister, Sept. 3 1940', p. 406 in Richard J. Overy, *The Air War: 1939-1945*, 3 ed. (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005) p. 39.

⁹⁴ Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (London: Collins, 1947) p. 134.

Harris also stressed his opinion that “an ordinary mixed British crew from all parts of the British Isles... is much better disciplined, and certainly better educated than the average colonial and dominion crew.”⁹⁵ Regardless of Harris’s opinions, Britain’s propagandists saw and took the opportunity to showcase what former Minister of Information John Reith termed “the truth, nothing but the truth, and, as near as possible, the whole truth” by emphasising the contributions and characteristics of the RAF’s commonwealth aviators.⁹⁶ Simultaneously, by promoting the service’s offensive operations against continental Europe, the British public were supplied with rare pieces of truly positive news without breaking Reith’s guidelines. Multiple propaganda media contributed to this projection of offensive power, including radio plays produced by civilians under MoI and AM guidance. Some, such as Cecil McGovern’s 1940 ‘Bombers over Germany’, told the story of fictional events purportedly based on fact, while others created narratives for real battles, exemplified by McGovern’s ‘Battle of Britain’.⁹⁷ Despite the narrative’s frequent appearance, however, the British public were reportedly “unconvinced by the material put out by the Air Ministry to prove the havoc done in Germany”, and the MoI’s “representations on the matter” were disregarded by the AM.⁹⁸

The period’s propagandisation of the RAF’s regional and national diversity is also reflected in feature films. During 1941 and 1942, encouraged by the global popularity of *The Lion Has Wings*, the AM cooperated closely with the MoI and Britain’s cinema industry to produce a number of feature films promoting the work of the RAF.⁹⁹ These films ranged in style from documentaries such as *Target for Tonight* (Watt, 1941) and *Coastal Command* (Holmes, 1942) to comedic thrillers like *Cottage to Let* (Asquith, 1941).¹⁰⁰ Many ostensibly fact-based dramas, such as *The First of the Few* (Howard, 1942), bridged these genres, while others such as *Dangerous Moonlight* romanticised the RAF’s continental European exiles.¹⁰¹ Among the most popular of these films was Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing*.¹⁰² Jo Fox makes only a passing mention to the film, using it alongside *The First of the Few* and *The Way to the Stars* (Asquith, 1945) as an example of “the most

⁹⁵ Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (London: Collins, 1947) p. 64.

⁹⁶ John Reith in David Welch, *Propaganda: Power and Persuasion* (London: The British Library, 2013) p. 34.

⁹⁷ Cecil McGovern, ‘Bombers over Germany’, 15 August 1940, Ref. No. 9CL0006043, British Library; Cecil McGovern, ‘Battle of Britain: A Radio Dramatisation’, 8 May 1941, BBC Home Service (accessed on www.bbc.co.uk/archive).

⁹⁸ Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945* (1979) p. 63

⁹⁹ Short, *Screening the Propaganda of British Air Power* (1997) p. 114; MacKenzie, ‘On Target’, 1997, p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Harry Watt, *Target for Tonight* (Royal Air Force Film Production Unit, 1941); J.B. Holmes, *Coastal Command* (Crown Film Unit, 1942); Anthony Asquith, *Cottage to Let* (Gainsborough Pictures, 1941).

¹⁰¹ Brian Desmond Hurst, *Dangerous Moonlight* (RKO Pictures, 1941).

¹⁰² Leslie Howard, *The First of the Few* (D&P Studios, 1942); Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

significant feature films about air power” produced by the British wartime film industry.¹⁰³ After this fleeting acknowledgement, Fox proceeds to her central argument concerning the “blitzed” narrative that defined Britain’s air war-related propaganda.¹⁰⁴ In doing so, Fox fails to recognise the film’s nuances, ignoring the influences of the Blitz and Britain’s resulting ‘people’s war’ narrative on the film’s portrayal of aerial warfare and those fighting it.

Praised by British audiences for its realism, and receiving Academy Award nominations for screenwriting and special effects, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* epitomises RAF aviators’ mid-war cinematic depiction, in which diverse and multi-layered characters were utilised to promote an equally diverse war effort.¹⁰⁵ The bombastic narration of *The Lion Has Wings* was replaced by swift, often apparently trivial, conversational dialogue between the film’s six central characters, who together form the crew of a Vickers Wellington bomber. Overtures on national pride and strength are replaced by jokes about family, football and peacetime occupations, and each character displays a wide range of emotions extending well beyond the simple monotonous expressions exhibited by their predecessors of 1939. A brief early scene from *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, in which main characters are introduced relaxing in their airfield’s Officers and Sergeants’ Messes, readily lends itself as an exemplar. The scene begins in the Officers’ Mess, where four of the main characters, all crewmembers of the same aircraft, converse while eating. Subjects of their discussion include family affairs such as the acquisition of an ewe for breeding with a family farm’s ram and a wife’s appearance on the radio the following day. The second half of the scene is set in the Sergeants’ Mess, with the remaining characters sitting around a radio with other Sergeants light-heartedly arguing over the football match they are listening to on a radio.

Upon first viewing, the viewer receives a strong impression of the cast’s diverse composition, subtly promoting the RAF’s diversity and by extension the MoI’s ‘people’s war’ message. Regional accents feature prominently in both the Officers’ and Sergeants’ Mess settings, with the second pilot Tom Earnshaw, played by Eric Portman, sporting a strong Yorkshire accent, Emrys Jones’s character Bob Ashley speaking with a Welsh inflection, and Bernard Miles adopting the accent of a lower-class East Londoner for his character Geoff Hickman.¹⁰⁶ References are also made to many of the characters’ peacetime occupations, with

¹⁰³ Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (New York: Berg, 2007) p. 94.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 94.

¹⁰⁵ MacKenzie, ‘On Target’, 1997, pp. 55-56.

¹⁰⁶ Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

Ashley's past as a professional football player revealed through a mention of his name by a commentator on the Sergeants' Mess radio. Similarly, Earnshaw's farming background, communicated by a letter from his father containing a picture of his family's a prize ram and its prospective mate, further emphasises the diverse makeup of RAF aircrews.¹⁰⁷ As in 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England', the RAF's international elements are alluded to by including a commonwealth aviator in the story, albeit briefly. In this case it is Canadian AG Hopkins, whose accent and expostulations are not only stereotypically North American, but mimicked by his English compatriots as though a defining characteristic.¹⁰⁸ The cast's regional and class diversity resulted from deliberate actions taken by Powell & Pressburger, responding to audience complaints about the almost unanimous presence of public school accents in earlier films depicting RAF aviators, particularly *Target for Tonight*.¹⁰⁹ To emphasise this diversity without straying too far from tradition and popular perception, higher-class accents and backgrounds still feature prominently in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. Characterised by their use of "BBC English", stereotypically-affluent backgrounds include Observer Frank Shelley's as an actor, Pilot John Glyn Haggard's as a diplomat's son, and "Sir" George Corbett as a politician.¹¹⁰ Corbett's character was based upon Arnold Wilson, Member of Parliament for Hitchin, who had recently volunteered for service in the RAF.¹¹¹

Although the distribution of regional and lower-class accents is not confined solely to the lower-ranking characters, with Yorkshire sheep farmer Earnshaw being a Flying Officer, the class implications of the rank system are still present. One instance of this lingering hierarchy is visible in the differences between the two settings: the Officers' and Sergeants' Messes, shown in Figures 1.6 and 1.7 respectively. In the former location, the scene opens on a large oil painting of King George VI hanging on the wall behind the characters' table, above an ornately-decorated mantelpiece adorned with three silver trophies. All are visible in Figure 1.6, and repeatedly appear in the background of later shots of the characters, reinforcing the connection between Officers and aristocratic practices.¹¹² Contrasting with this elegantly traditional background, the walls of the Sergeants' Mess are adorned with sports shields and a variety of posters, including a Fougasse 'careless talk' cartoon above the radio in Figure 1.8.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ MacKenzie, 'On Target', 1997, p. 56.

¹¹⁰ Ibid; Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

¹¹¹ MacKenzie, 'On Target', 1997, p. 55.

¹¹² Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

¹¹³ Ibid.

Waiters and waitresses wander between the long tables in the Officers' Mess as the diners eat their food, talking quietly whilst sitting up straight. Meanwhile, the Sergeants adopt mixture of standing, leaning, and reversed-chair postures, as in Figure 1.7, as they smoke, argue and yell over boisterous background conversation and a radio blaring football commentary.¹¹⁴ Regardless of rank, however, all characters wear clean, neatly-pressed and well-repaired uniforms worn in perfect order. Accordingly, despite the attempts of Powell and Pressburger to shatter class and regionality stereotypes, inferences to the RAF's elitism and social hierarchy remain in the film's costumes and settings.



Fig. 1.6. *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*: A painting of King George VI hangs in the Officers' Mess.¹¹⁵



Fig. 1.7. *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*: The Sergeants talk and listen to the radio.¹¹⁶



Fig. 1.8. *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*: A Sergeant pilot leans against a shelf listening to the radio.¹¹⁷

These references to the characters' pre-war lives lend them more depth than their one-dimensional, idealised counterparts of earlier films, making them more relatable to the audience, many of whom undoubtedly had friends or family serving in the RAF. This humanising process is aided by references to the characters' lives outside of the service and

¹¹⁴ Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

hopes for a post-war future, with mention made of Earnshaw's fiancée, Corbett's "last trip", and Shelly's wife, later revealed as a singer.¹¹⁸ Accordingly, many of the film's characters emerge fully-formed and multi-dimensional in a matter of minutes, in stark contrast to bombastic, yet ultimately meaningless, narration of *The Lion Has Wings*. One example of this difference between the two films' characters is their expressive range. Those of the earlier film are confined to exhibit love, pride, and dedication, best exemplified by the silent facial expressions of the characters in Figures 1.3 and 1.4.¹¹⁹ By contrast, in this brief scene alone from *One of our Aircraft is Missing*, both the main and supporting characters exuberantly display a much wider range of emotions, both visually and verbally. These include Sergeant Hopkins's anger then resignation at not flying that night, Pilot Haggard and Second Pilot Earnshaw's sarcastic mimicry of Observer Shelley's reminders about his wife's radio programme, and Shelly's resulting embarrassment.¹²⁰

The three examples analysed in this section by no means account for all of the themes present in the propaganda depictions of aviators during this period. However, the AM's use of imagery and storytelling to entertain and inspire prospective recruits was markedly different from their purely informative material of the previous era, with the few months following the Battle of Britain seeing the evolution of the paradigmatic propaganda aviator. Similarly, the new emphasis on the RAF's diverse composition and informality is best appreciated when compared to earlier representations examined in this chapter's first section. Contrasting strikingly from their interbellum-narratives-based, largely-anonymous, personality-lacking predecessors, the aviators promoted by Britain's propagandists following the Battle of Britain appeared as remarkably well-rounded characters. Not only did these characters exhibit a great deal of individuality and a wide emotive range, their diverse backgrounds and imaginatively active lifestyles improved their relatability to equally diverse audiences, contributing to the MoI's propagandisation of the conflict as a 'people's war'. Furthermore, these new representations, through their use of emotion and narrative, drew viewers into the aviators' world, making their image all the more heroic in the process.

The Final Years

In the Second World War's final years, the MoI continued to emphasise the war's international nature, with increasing importance placed upon the cooperation between Britain and the USA.

¹¹⁸ Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

¹¹⁹ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

¹²⁰ Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

However, the development of aviators as focuses of propaganda explored in the previous section was relatively short-lived. From 1942 until the war's end, the AM and RAF leadership exhibited a reluctance to cooperate with the cinema industry, resulting in a marked drop in films depicting the air war. Furthermore, with the advances in the Mediterranean theatre and the establishment of a 'second front' with the invasion of France, providing previously-scant sources of positive news for Britain's propagandists, the RAF's activities fell from prominence. The RAF's presence across all propaganda media dropped significantly, with British and American aviators featuring only infrequently in commercially-produced newsreels, and little to no printed propaganda material produced at all. This drought is attributable to numerous reasons, among them being the probability that the RAF's fame was so well established following their victory in the Battle of Britain that propaganda proved superfluous. Another cause was Arthur Harris, the new Commander-in-Chief of BC, who strongly opined that the only propaganda necessary to improve his Command's standing in the eyes of the British public were reports on the size and destructive capabilities of the service's air raids on Germany.¹²¹ Despite this shift and resulting decline in aviators' propaganda appearances, a limited number of examples were produced which serve, albeit not as readily as their predecessors of the previous sections, to exemplify the depictions of aviators in the conflict's final years. In place of the discontinued newspaper recruitment advertisements, a pictorial newspaper article from the *London Illustrated News* is analysed here, along with the Pathé newsreel story 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms' and feature film *The Way to the Stars*.

After the brief 'Fly with the RAF' campaign, the AM ceased widespread promotion of its aviators for the war's remainder. With no examples of printed white propaganda produced by either the AM or MoI, the only remaining examples of RAF aviators' newspaper promotion are those created by the newspapers themselves, based on information provided by the AM.¹²² With the AM's press releases increasingly promoting its actions, the newspaper reports their bulletins inspired had a similar tendency to report aerial activity with little to no mention of the aviators themselves.¹²³ While many newspapers produced these articles in writing, *The Illustrated London News* often condensed these reports into caption form to accompany dramatic artworks spanning two pages. An April 1943 piece reporting Bomber aircrews'

¹²¹ MacKenzie examines this drop in MoI-AM cooperation his article 'On Target', 1997, pp. 58-59.

¹²² Welch, *Propaganda* (2013) p. 36.

¹²³ For an example of these bulletin articles, see 'Offensive Resumed Over France', 22 January 1944, *The Times*, p. 4.

experiences of anti-aircraft fire over Berlin, with an accompanying illustration by Bryan de Grineau, typifies these articles' translation of the AM's action-focused agenda.¹²⁴

Like the brief bulletin reports produced by the AM, RAF aviators only appear through their actions in the pictorial article 'R.A.F. Bombers 'Among the Daisies' Over Berlin: New Types of Flak Seen over the German Capital'. Although this wholehearted focus on aviators' work was new to Britain, the tactic had been utilised by German propagandists since the war's outbreak, exemplified by *Signal* magazine's coverage of the Luftwaffe's role in the Norwegian Campaign. *Signal* utilised aerial photographs of Junkers 87 Stuka aircraft, Norwegian fjords and a radio station ringed with explosions as the central components of its May 1940 story 'Diving Fighters over Fjords', adding only dramatic captions to embellish the images' loose narrative.¹²⁵ *Signal* continued to use this method in later articles, adopting a similar mixture of photographs with accompanying short captions in a March 1942 article describing air attacks on Malta.¹²⁶ Like 'Diving Fighters over Fjords', 'Among the Daisies' Over Berlin' names no specific personnel, but their anonymous quotes, chosen for their illustrative flair, describe the anti-aircraft fire and are replicated in de Grineau's painting. Similes appear frequently, comparing the artillery bursts to "a great flaming daisy" and "catherine wheels on Guy Fawkes night", aiding in the reader's comprehension of the otherwise unfathomable scene.¹²⁷ Similarly, the article emphasises the RAF's destructive power, opening by describing the raid as the "heaviest heaver" and closing with a quote by USAAF "Major S.S. Bartlett" likening the city to "an oven".¹²⁸ The aggressive language is matched by the image, with flame, smoke, explosions and movement amply depicted to communicate the scene's energy. However, the article also downplays the danger the anti-aircraft fire posed to the RAF crews, stating that "the crews were mostly intrigued" and quoting "a Lancaster pilot" claiming that "they didn't trouble us" once the crews "got wise to them".¹²⁹ Accordingly, the RAF's destructive capabilities are promoted, Germany's defences are dismissed, and RAF aviators do not appear vulnerable or weak to the article's audience. From the association of image and aircrews' quotes, the British public had presumably become accustomed to associating RAF aviators with their actions. This acclimatisation was presumably aided by the increasing use of cine-gun footage and aerial

¹²⁴ 'R.A.F. Bombers 'Among the Daisies' Over Berlin: New Types of Flak Seen over the German Capital', 3 April 1943, *The Illustrated London News*, pp. 374-375.

¹²⁵ 'Diving Fighters over Fjords', 15 May 1940, *Signal*, p. 14 in S.L. Mayer (ed.), *Best of Signal: Hitler's Wartime Picture Magazine* (New York: Gallery Books, 1984) p. 21.

¹²⁶ 'Deutsche Bomber Über Malta', 2 March 1942, *Signal*, p. 3.

¹²⁷ 'R.A.F. Bombers 'Among the Daisies' Over Berlin', 1943, *Illustrated London News*, pp. 374-375.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

photographs, both taken by aircraft during operations, in newsreels and newspaper articles to illustrate the air war's destructive results.¹³⁰ Thus, with their actions shown directly to the audience, pilots no longer needed inclusion for appreciation. Instead, attributions to their actions and anonymous quotes sufficed to garner audience interest and appreciation.

Despite their disappearance from official reports and propaganda, the image of the stereotypical aviator continued appearing in commercial advertisements, including a June 1944 piece by electrical company R.A. Lister, using the RAF aviator as the basis for their product's promotion.¹³¹ Both used numerous symbols, many featuring in Chapter Two, to identify the characters as aviators, and imbued them with heroic attributes. Lister encouraged the reader to:

“Ask an airman what he knows about Lister's. He won't tell you, but his mind will probably go back to his country home and the Lister plan which produced the power for the lights, the electric heater, the wireless and a score of other purposes.”¹³²

If an aviator believed R.A. Lister was the best suppliers of power units, however subconsciously, then such must be the case. As in previous commercial uses, the depicted aviator was simply an anonymous exemplar of his group. However, his occupation continued to be highlighted as a character-defining trait, and utilised by the company as a mark of reliability.

These printed depictions of aviators and their work bear strong similarity to those propagated in contemporary newsreel stories. Like their printed counterparts, the few newsreel stories on the air war produced after 1943 tend to focus on aviators' actions, not aviators themselves.¹³³ The Pathé Gazette newsreel story 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms' exemplifies these late-war reports.¹³⁴ As with the visual newspaper reports, 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms' focuses on the actions of the RAF and United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), this action being their infamous bombing of Dresden over two days in February 1944. Unlike the

¹³⁰ For a newsreel story using cine-gun footage, see 'Fighter Sweeps', 14 May 1942, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1326.35); for a newspaper article using aerial photographs, see 'Tallinn: Baltic Port Bombed', 26 June 1941, *The Times*, p. 6.

¹³¹ R.A. Lister & Co., 'Ask an Airman' 3 June 1944, *The Illustrated London News*, p. 639.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Examples include 'Raid on Turin', 19 July 1943, British Movietone News (accessed on www.aparchive.com, Ref. No. BM43857); 'Raf Conducts Bombing Raids on German Industrial Areas', 24 February 1944, Gaumont British News (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. VLVACLQ5AG44H2HB01B5T4YP386SK); 'Allied Air Activities', Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1139.26).

¹³⁴ 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms', 22 February 1945, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1147.17).

newspaper articles, however, the story makes no mention of either service's aviators, specific or general, in its discussion of their operations. Owing to the availability, and resulting extensive use, of aerial footage relevant to the story, pilots no longer required inclusion as ambassadors of their service. This footage, taken by the RAFFPU's Operational Unit, was taken on one or more of the Unit's "over 680 operational sorties" by the Unit's cameramen, including actor Richard Attenborough.¹³⁵ Thanks to the availability of this footage, stories such as 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms' could exhibit and discuss the now-visible results of the air war, replacing its predecessors' non-specific praise for the aviators' vague, invisible actions. The later newsreel's use of the available footage also differs slightly from its earlier counterparts, with briefer, more rapidly-changing film segments used to illustrate the shorter, blunter narrative. Swift changes in footage occur in the early stages of the story, with different shots of burning city and anti-aircraft fire being shown in quick succession, a process repeated in the story's later stages with shots of falling bombs and flying aircraft.¹³⁶

Differences aside, the passing use of aviation jargon in 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England' is continued in 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms', with the narrator referring to "the newest German ack-ack device", "Ack-ack" being a slang abbreviation for anti-aircraft fire.¹³⁷ The use of this term, without any explanation, implies that the creators assumed that their audience was either familiar with it, or would be impressed by the use of aviation jargon into seeing the story as more authentic than those without. Furthermore, intimate knowledge of the air war is implied by the passing mention of "B-17 bombers", with no further information on their manufacturer, capabilities, or use, as other newsreel stories did when describing newly-publicised aircraft.¹³⁸ By naming and providing accurate, recently-captured footage of contemporary aircraft, however, the story differs markedly from its early-war equivalents, exemplified by the use of biplanes in the closing shots of 'Cavalry of the Clouds', and Fairey Battle bombers in place of Spitfires in *The Lion Has Wings*. In a further similarity to 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England', 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms' was clearly produced with the intent of promoting the war's international nature, with equal focus on the RAF's and USAAF's contribution to the operation. However, this internationalism extends only so far as

¹³⁵ Buckman, 'The Royal Air Force Film Production Unit', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 1997, p. 222.

¹³⁶ 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms', 1945, Pathé Gazette.

¹³⁷ Ibid; Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of RAF Slang* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016).

¹³⁸ 'Dresden Bombed to Atoms', 1945, Pathé Gazette. For examples of newsreel stories espousing the qualities of new aircraft, see 'Hurri-Bomber', 1 December 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1137.38); 'Flying Fortresses Bomb France', 6 October 1942, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1338.27).

promoting Anglo-American cooperation, with only a passing reference to Russia by mentioning the city's use as a staging point for soldiers heading to the Eastern Front. 'Dresden bombed to Atoms', therefore, serves as more than an exemplar Britain's promotion of its area bombing campaign in the final year of the Second World War. The story also exemplifies the period's international politics, with increasing dependence on the USA and mistrust of the Soviet Union reflected in the attention given to each nation's war effort, thereby reflecting their status in the eyes of Britain's Government.

Anglo-American cooperation was also a popular subject in feature films produced in the war's final years, exemplified by *The Way to the Stars* (Asquith, 1945).¹³⁹ Although released after Victory in Europe, the film was produced during the conflict in the early months of 1945 under MoI sponsorship and AM approval.¹⁴⁰ Following on from the successes of the Royal Navy's *In Which We Serve* (Coward & Lean, 1942) and British Army's *The Way Ahead* (Reed, 1944), *The Way to the Stars* was intended as the final instalment in a trio dramatizing the lives of service personnel.¹⁴¹ The film centres on a British airfield occupied first by British then American bomber crews, depicting the aviators experiencing a wide range of emotions and scenarios including love, bereavement, stress, homesickness, anger, and overconfidence. Although Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards examine *The Way to the Stars*'s propaganda value, based largely on evidence of the film's reception such as newspaper reviews, they dedicate the majority of their argument to examining the film's popularity.¹⁴² Aldgate and Richards, like many other film historians, confine their examinations to their subject's production and reception. This approach is exponentially improvable by close textual analyses, examining the film's specific details to reveal its deliberate construction to improve RAF aviators' propaganda image. Several scenes throughout the film prove useful when analysing the composition of RAF and USAAF aviators' contemporary propaganda depictions. One scene, in which the RAF Controllers react to the airfield's newly-arrived American residents, exemplifies these representations' film appearances and their use in communicating MoI messages.

¹³⁹ Robert Murphy, 'The British Film Industry: Audiences and Producers' in Philip M. Taylor, *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) p. 41; Anthony Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (Two Cities Films, 1945).

¹⁴⁰ Aldgate & Richards, *Britain Can Take It* (1994) p. 281, 287.

¹⁴¹ Noel Coward & David Lean, *In Which We Serve* (Two Cities Films, 1942); Carol Reed, *The Way Ahead* (Two Cities Films, 1944); Aldgate & Richards, *Britain Can Take It* (1994) p. 208.

¹⁴² Aldgate & Richards, *Britain Can Take It* (1994) pp. 295-296.

The scene, like many in films promoting Anglo-American cooperation, is rife with references to British & American stereotypes. Direct comparisons between misunderstandings of quintessentially American and British habits dominate the conversation. The British characters bemoan, visibly pained as in Figure 1.9, the Americans' misunderstanding of tea, while simultaneously voicing their confusion over their foreign guests' enjoyment of baseball and "revolting" peanut butter.¹⁴³ The Americans' brash claims to "drop a bomb into a barrel from 30,000 feet" evokes the understated sarcastic response of "well, well" from RAF officer Peter Penrose.¹⁴⁴ Although in earlier scenes the RAF aircrew act in a far more casual manner than their counterparts in earlier films such as *The Lion Has Wings*, here they are painted as old-fashioned and demure to highlight their antitheses in the USAAF personnel, emphasised by the majority of the scene showing the British officers engaged in pouring and drinking tea.¹⁴⁵ The short, blunt, dialogue between American Bombardier Joe Friselli and an American mess worker, over the question of "what's for dinner" stands acutely at odds with the long, eloquent, full sentences used by the British characters when discussing the possibility of "ops" the next day.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, the RAF characters' clean, neatly-pressed uniforms contrast strikingly with the USAAF overalls and "flying clothes".¹⁴⁷ The sartorial differences are further highlighted by the characters' dialogue, with the Americans' wearing of said "flying clothes in the Mess" evoking remarks of horror, confusion and jocular determination to "try and rise above it" from the British officers.¹⁴⁸



Fig. 1.9. 'Tinker-bell' complains to Williams in *The Way to the Stars*.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

To emphasise the differences between the film's RAF and USAAF characters, many of the British cast were deliberately chosen based on their reputation for playing upper-class roles in other films. Exemplifying this casting is Basil Radford as Flight Lieutenant 'Tiny' Williams, a good-natured RAF Controller whose age is alluded to by the line of First World War medals on his chest, visible in Figure 1.9.¹⁵⁰ Radford was previously known for playing the bumbling, yet amiable, first half of the duo Charters and Caldicott who appeared in a number of films between 1938 and 1949, including *The Lady Vanishes* (Hitchcock, 1939), *Night Train to Munich* (Reed, 1940) and *Millions Like Us* (Gilliat & Launder, 1943).¹⁵¹ Despite these deliberate contrasts, however, a considerable amount of RAF slang is used by the British characters throughout the scene, presumably with the intention of retaining an authentic ring to the dialogue. Examples of this slang include the words "Ops", short for 'operations' or missions, and "Forts", an abbreviation of Fortresses, the RAF name for the USAAF's Boeing B-17 'Flying Fortress' bombers.¹⁵² Despite the creators' intention of contrasting the two nations' stereotypes, therefore, traces of the RAF's stylishly-casual image remained.

Much of this stereotyping and commentary on cultural differences is scratching an itch felt by the British audiences, damning Americans for their overconfidence and naïveté upon their entry into war. This scene, and those immediately prior to and following it, act as the rope with which the American characters hang themselves after experiencing combat, which they later admit was more difficult than they expected. After his brash claims on his bombing prowess, Friselli goes so far as apologise to Penrose for his arrogant behaviour, stating that "If I gave you or anybody else the idea that bombing targets over the other side was going to be easy, I'll eat my words right here and now."¹⁵³ The two characters later exit the film in its final scene, walking into the night sharing 'a light', united by their experiences.¹⁵⁴ This relatively early scene adopts an antagonistic attitude towards American visitors in Britain, an attitude shared by many British citizens. Furthermore, by having the RAF characters voice many of these anti-American opinions, they are made more relatable to the film's British audience, improving the audience's opinion of the service and its members. However, these antagonisms do not last long in the film, and the characters' differences are gradually broken down through

¹⁵⁰ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

¹⁵¹ Alfred Hitchcock, *The Lady Vanishes* (Gainsborough Pictures, 1938); Carol Reed, *Night Train to Munich* (Twentieth Century Productions, 1940); Sidney Gilliat & Frank Launder, *Millions Like Us* (Gainsborough Pictures, 1943).

¹⁵² Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

depictions of shared suffering and replaced comradeship. This process, in turn, breaks down the British audience's prejudices and encourages comradeship between them and their American contemporaries., the film's principle purpose.¹⁵⁵

These stereotypical squabbles aside, *The Way to the Stars* continues the precedent set by *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* of depicting aviators as humanised, emotional and relatable characters. At an earlier point in the film from the previously-examined scene, Michael Redgrave's character Squadron Leader David Archdale is killed on an operation over France. Following this, several scenes, tense with emotion, depict the impact of the event on those around him. His friend Penrose, when asked by Williams to inform Archdale's wife of her husband's death, refuses, snapping:

What's there to tell her? 'Your husband crashed into a hill in France and got burnt'? 'We're all very sorry because he was a good bloke and we all liked him very much'! You'd better get the adjutant to write her one of those letters of his, he knows what to say, god knows he's had plenty of practice.

He'd got no right to get married and have a kid. We none of us have.¹⁵⁶

Although by no means a positive depiction of the air war, the characters appear more human and relatable through their suffering than their implacable predecessors of earlier films. Positive emotions also appear throughout *The Way to the Stars*, with several comical incidents similar to those in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* utilised to inject humour into the otherwise brutally-grounded narrative. This balancing of positive with negative is exemplified by the sequential placement of moving and humorous scenes, with the Archdale's death and its repercussions directly followed by the Americans' arrival and their comical interactions with the RAF characters.¹⁵⁷ This mixing of emotions, combined with the more nuanced character-based narrative result in the complete absence of the stiffness exhibited in *The Lion Has Wings*. This informality is evidenced by the RAF officers' interactions in the analysed scene, with no mention made of their respective ranks being made and no use of the word "sir", despite Williams and 'Tinker Bell' both being Flight Lieutenants, outranking Flying Officer Penrose.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Aldgate & Richards, *Britain Can Take It* (1994) p. 280

¹⁵⁶ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939); Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

The closing years of the Second World War offer few examples of propagandised aviators. However, this absence is in itself evidence of the AM's changing priorities, and the impact of this change on the aviators' representations in propaganda. While the war's first half had seen successive changes to the RAF aviator's propaganda image, this evolution halted after 1943, coinciding with Home Intelligence's discontinuation of its weekly reports on public opinion.¹⁵⁹ As earlier changes to the RAF aviators' representations were made to improve audience recognition and engagement, and these changes ended with the information on public perception, the two discontinuations were clearly related. Although aviators appeared less frequently, the MoI's focus on international cooperation continued through new depictions of aviators' operational capabilities, with aircraft and evidence of destruction replacing earlier depictions of humans as representatives of each nation's contribution. The represented nations also changed, with Anglo-American relations replacing commonwealth unity as the chief focus. This new promotion reflected the British government's desire to improve diplomatic ties for the sake of military and financial aid, a desire that only strengthened as British loans mounted after the end of the 'lend-lease' agreement and the Second World War morphed into the Cold War.¹⁶⁰ However, in the few instances where aviators appeared as historical actors and not merely disembodied machine operators, depictions of their informality continued. Feature film characters' emotional range extended beyond the comical interactions of *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* to include suffering and anguish, aiding in their relatability.

Conclusions

The first half of the Second World War saw a rapid development in the propagandised image of RAF aviators presented to the British public in newspapers, newsreels and film. All of these sources were, subject to the approval of, if not directly created by, the AM through supply of footage and, in the case of cinema, props such as uniforms and aircraft. In newspaper and newsreel reports, this increasingly-humanised image reached its peak between 1942 and 1943, replaced almost entirely thereafter by depictions of the aviators' work. The motives behind these changes are unclear. However, the initial change from one-dimensional to diverse characters in the post-Battle of Britain era was most likely driven by public opinion. With the AM focused on winning said battle and the MoI in disarray under the weight of political

¹⁵⁹ David Welch, 'Intelligence' in Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert & David Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003) p. 180.

¹⁶⁰ Aldgate & Richards, *Britain Can Take It* (1994) p. 280; Leon Martel, *Lend-Lease, Loans and the Coming of the Cold War: A Study of the Implementation of Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979) p. 212; Roy Douglas, *From War to Cold War: 1942-48* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981) p. 87.

pressure, neither ministry was inclined to scrutinise and re-model aviators' propaganda image, both being preoccupied with their own problems. However, evidence in the form of commercial advertisements and cartoons indicates that the British public were already viewing RAF aviators as rakishly-relaxed with inferences to their reputation as womanisers. This evidence implies that rather than being an invention of either the AM or MoI the propagandising of the informal, emotional RAF aviator image was merely an attempt by both ministries to catch up with public opinion and manipulate it to aid in the MoI's promotion of a diverse Britain and Commonwealth fighting a 'people's war'.

The second change from aviators' frequent promotion to their disappearance from newsreels & newspapers was clearly influenced by both the AM & RAF. BC's Commander in Chief Arthur Harris's violently negative reaction to actor Jack Watling's emotional depiction of a nervous breakdown when playing a bomber pilot in Terrence Rattigan's 1942 stage play *Flare Path* exemplifies this disdain for the humanisation of their aviators.¹⁶¹ This reluctance to promote their aviators in propaganda, and more specifically their antipathy towards Rattigan's experience-based aviator characters, is also evidenced in *The Way to the Stars*'s production. The film that was released, a month after Germany's surrender, was markedly different from its inspiration of three years earlier. No longer was the focus on four central bomber crewmembers, one Polish and the remainder British, and their relationships with their wives in the setting of a hotel bar.¹⁶² Instead, in keeping with the MoI's promotion of Anglo-American cooperation, the film told the story of an airfield and those working on it during its use by first RAF and later USAAF bomber squadrons.¹⁶³ The hotel bar and the relationships between aircrew and civilian women remain, but only as a minor component of the larger, international relations-based story.¹⁶⁴ However, the film continues the increasingly-humanising trend found in many of its predecessors such as *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, with Archdale's death and its repercussions featuring as a prominent turning-point in the plot.¹⁶⁵ Although no characters break down with stress as in *Flare Path*, Penrose's clearly-exhibited grief strongly differentiates the film's characters from the emotionless, imperturbable, almost-superhuman figures of *The Lion Has Wings*.¹⁶⁶ Despite the best attempts of the AM, the film industry and

¹⁶¹ Harris yelled "bloody disgraceful, showing cowardice in the face of the enemy!" at Watling in a backstage meeting after the production's opening night. MacKenzie, 'On Target', 1997, p. 43.

¹⁶² Terrence Rattigan, 'Flare Path', in Terrence Rattigan (ed.), *The Collected Plays of Terrence Rattigan*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953) pp. 83-169.

¹⁶³ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid; Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

public had apparently become attached to pilots' relatable characterisations. Even *Journey Together*, the only feature film produced in its entirety by the RAF, centred its plot around the protagonist's failed attempt to become a pilot. During his transition to becoming a Navigator, Richard Attenborough's character David Wilton exhibits disappointment, malignant envy, apathy and anxiousness, all emotions entirely absent from *The Lion Has Wings*.¹⁶⁷

Cinematic representations of aviators as individuals also continued following the cessation of hostilities, with Powell and Pressburger once again using an RAF bomber pilot as their protagonist in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946).¹⁶⁸ In stark contrast from the work-defined characters of *The Lion has Wings*, who always appear in either uniform or flying gear, the main character Peter Carter, played by David Niven, appears for much of the film in a simple tweed blazer.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, Carter's spends much of his time with his love interest, June, contemplating his visions of heaven.¹⁷⁰ By contrast, Ralph Richardson's character in *The Lion Has Wings*, inventively named Wing Commander Richardson, spends the majority of his time at his work.¹⁷¹ Even when off-duty, Richardson spends most of his time discussing either his work or the War with his wife, played by Merle Oberon.¹⁷² This comparison best exemplifies the broader transition from service- to character-centric characters found across all propaganda media. The following chapters deconstruct the propagandised aviator's evolving image into its visual and characteristic components, identifying the recurring traits that formed its basis throughout the conflict.

¹⁶⁷ Boulting, *Journey Together* (1945).

¹⁶⁸ Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, *A Matter of Life and Death* (The Archers, 1946).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

¹⁷² Ibid.

Chapter Two: Encouraging Identification

Images like those examined in Chapter One made a significant contribution to Second World War propaganda, with information frequently relayed to the public through both moving and still pictures in such media as newsreels, newspapers, and posters.¹ Accordingly, the aviator's image was pivotal in the British public's comprehension of the air war, with RAF personnel depicted in flattering lights both in and outside of their working environment. In these depictions, clothing, insignia and equipment repeatedly served as signifying features of characters' employment and roles, replacing the individual personalities of the anonymous aviators. In many cases, insignia such as 'wings' brevets denoted their wearers' specific roles within the service, with information on these symbols often supplied to the public through newspaper articles.² Similarly, German and Italian airmen were frequently 'othered' using, among others, sardonic depictions of their autocratic command systems and humiliating photographs of prisoners being paraded through London train stations.³ This chapter expands on the previous chapter's chronological approach by examining the recurring symbolic components of RAF aviators' propaganda image. This analysis draws examples from multiple media, identifying and comparing their use of clothing, insignia and flying equipment as symbols aiding their audiences' identification and appreciation of aviators. These symbols and their use reflect the AM and MoI's many and changing propaganda messages, many revealed in Chapter One. Several of these examples reveal the emergence of two distinct "fighter types" and "bomber boys" identities from the original homogenous aviator stereotype, a shift directly linked with the AM and MoI's use of visual symbols in their propaganda material.⁴ These analyses presage Chapter Three's exploration of two recurring characteristics of the RAF aviator's propaganda persona, which this Chapter's symbols aided in establishing and communicating. For further information on the equipment referenced in this chapter, Andrew Cormack's brief yet thorough contribution on RAF uniforms to Osprey's 'Men at Arms Series' is recommended to the reader.⁵ Although not an academic work in the strictest of terms, Cormack's use of both governmental and personal primary sources such as memoranda and

¹ Welch, *Propaganda* (2013) p. 20.

² For an example of publicising insignia, see 'New Badge for Air Gunners', 11 January 1940, *The Times*, p. 8.

³ For an example of German aviators in British newspapers, see 'Our Uninvited Guests: A Few of Hitler's 13,500 Lost Airmen', 12 October 1940, *The Illustrated London News*, p. 437.

⁴ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945); Howard French, *Secret Mission* (Excelsior Films, 1942).

⁵ Andrew Cormack, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1990).

photographs, to examine the production, introduction and use of RAF clothing makes his work invaluable to this thesis's examination of their subsequent politicised use.

Clothing



Fig. 2.1. The AM simplifies the RAF's recruitment process using clothing.⁶

With the Second World War's mass mobilisation, uniforms, particularly those of military services, became omnipresent in the societies of combatant nations during the Second World War. A military uniform identified the wearer as 'doing their bit', and a lack of uniform condemned one as a coward, with many men going through "pure hell", one Canadian factory worker likening it to the experiences of "a Negro in Georgia".⁷ Simultaneously, uniforms came to attract attributes, with each service's work and ethos being represented by its clothing. Uniforms' impact on British public perception of military service is exhibited by their use in numerous recruitment posters, including the 1939 work 'England Expects – National Service', depicting multiple personnel with their faces left blurry and uniforms highly detailed.⁸ Accordingly, RAF aviators' public image was shaped not only by their actions, but by their garb, with many propaganda depictions going to great lengths to include their uniform. Simultaneously, numerous RAF recruitment advertisements specifically used the motif of

⁶ 'Reserved Men! Change Your Overalls for Flying Kit', 1939-1945, Ref. No. FA10774, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

⁷ Anonymous, 'Home Front: Pure Hell for a Guy not in Uniform, Canada, 1943' in Jon E. Lewis (ed.), *World War II: The Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2009) pp. 407-408.

⁸ 'England Expects - National Service', 1939, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 13959, Imperial War Museums Collections.

clothing, often the theme of transitioning from factory overalls to uniform, to entice prospective recruits into ‘joining up’. These are exemplified in the poster ‘Reserved Men! Change Your Overalls for Flying Kit’, Figure 2.1, where the uncomfortably hot red colours of the reserved man’s enclosed factory contrast strikingly with the cool blue and bright white of the aviator’s spacious airfield.⁹ This section analyses the use of the four clothing articles most commonly worn by aircrew in propaganda images: the Service Dress uniform, War Service Dress uniform, 1930 Pattern ‘Sidcot’ Flying Suit, and Irvin Suit.



Fig. 2.2. Flight Lieutenant Noble Frankland’s Service Dress uniform jacket.¹⁰

At the conflict’s outbreak, the standard garb of all RAF personnel was the 1939 Pattern Service Dress, a uniform widely renowned for its stylish cut compared to its the Army and Navy counterparts. Although the Officer’s barathea version shown in Figure 2.2 varied slightly in material from its coarse serge Other Ranks equivalent, both differed strikingly from the British Army’s equivalent Battledress in colour and design.¹¹ The RAF’s tunic had an open falling collar, exposing the sky-blue collared shirt and black tie worn beneath. These, in conjunction with its long hem, brass buttons and pleated pockets, lent the wearer an air of professionalism much at odds with the “convict” feeling the British soldier got from the Battledress, the appearance of which Spike Milligan likened to a “[sack] of shit tied up in the middle”.¹² Thanks to being individually tailored for officers, the Service Dress uniform was

⁹ ‘Reserved Men! Change Your Overalls for Flying Kit’, 1939-1945, Ref. No. FA10774, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

¹⁰ ‘Jacket, Service Dress: Flight Lieutenant (Navigator), RAF’, 1939-45, Ref. No. UNI 1423, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (UNI 1423), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

¹¹ For an example of an Other Ranks Service Dress jacket, see ‘Jacket, Service Dress, 1936 Pattern: Corporal, RAF’, 1944, Ref. No. UNI 11593, Imperial War Museums Collections

¹² Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944); Spike Milligan, *Rommel? Gunner Who?: A Confrontation in the Desert* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974) p. 29.

also markedly more stylish than the Battledress, with its form-fitting waist, broad lapels and padded shoulders conforming to contemporary civilian fashion trends.¹³ Multiple authors have examined the interplay between military masculinity and civilian fashion in the mid-20th C, with Jennifer Craik arguing that practicality and civilian fashions were the strongest influences on Second World War military uniforms.¹⁴ Christopher Breward states, however, that civilian men's suits' popularity during the conflict was grounded in the lingering militarised fashions of the First World War, acting as "the defining badge of healthy and respectable masculinity... from the 1920s to the 1960s."¹⁵ Breward also contests Diana Crane's argument, who posits that the suit was primarily worn for employment, with its leisure use based solely on the wearer's financial restrictions to their wardrobe.¹⁶ However, these arguments all apply to the Service Dress's symbolic value, with the uniform's conformation to masculine civilian fashion making its wearers not only strikingly attractive, but easily distinguishable by a layperson. Despite its high quality, the Service Dress served as the universal uniform of all RAF personnel throughout the conflict, being worn by RAF personnel across the world in all situations from ceremonial to recreational. With some minor alterations, the uniform continues in use today by the RAF for ceremonial occasions, under the title of 'Number 1 Service Dress', a testament to its popularity as an emblem of the service. Owing to its widespread use, the Service Dress became renowned throughout British society as the uniform of the RAF, and thereby that of an aviator.

Examples of the Service Dress's popularity and recognition are identifiable in the numerous wartime cartoons of RAF airmen. Two cartoonists notable for their frequent depiction of RAF personnel are Joseph Lee, creator of the *Evening News* series 'Smiling Through', and Ronald Niebour, the *Daily Mail* cartoonist also known by his pseudonym 'NEB'. Both artists commonly drew their aviator subjects in Service Dress, but the true testament to the uniform's value as a self-sufficient symbol comes from one of Niebour's illustrations published on 28 July 1941. The piece shows two RAF pilots leaning against a bar with beers in hand, and a third, alien pilot with two antennae protruding from his bulging head.¹⁷ Captioned to reveal one of the human aviators' remarks, "They Borrowed him from

¹³ For examples of tailors targeting RAF officers, see Austin Reed, 'Hurricane Service', 9 July 1940, *The Times*, p. 3; Burberrys, 'Piloted Through...', 23 November 1940, *The Illustrated London News*, p. 2. Mansfield & Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Twentieth Century* (1973) p. 304.

¹⁴ Craik, *Uniforms Exposed* (2005) p. 49.

¹⁵ Christopher Breward, *The Suit: Form, Function & Style* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016) pp. 59, 61

¹⁶ Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) p. 174.

¹⁷ Ronald Niebour, "'They borrowed him from Mars to help train stratosphere pilots'", 28 July 1941, *Daily Mail* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. NEB0090).

Mars to help train stratosphere pilots” depicts all of its characters in Service Dress, with the uniform identifying the central alien character, despite not being human, as an RAF aviator. The alien aviator also displays other characteristics stereotypical of RAF pilots, such as a pipe, relaxed posture, and alcohol, all explored further in Chapter Three. Without his Service Dress uniform, however, none of the accompanying characteristics indisputably define the character as an RAF aviator.

The RAF’s Service Dress also saw frequent symbolic use in radio broadcasts, despite the difficulties presented by referencing visual tropes in a verbal medium. Examples include the comedy show ‘Merry-Go-Round’, whose RAF editions, featuring Kenneth Horne and Richard Murdoch’s famous ‘Much Binding in the Marsh’ sketches, became a favourite of King George VI’s.¹⁸ ‘Merry-Go-Round’s RAF editions made numerous references to the service’s eccentricities, and each episode was introduced as being in “air force blue”, referencing the Service Dress uniform’s colour.¹⁹ To the modern eye, the RAF’s Service Dress uniform appears inconspicuous, and even less conspicuous when depicted in black-and-white. However, its widespread recognition, and thereby value as a visual identifier, are amply demonstrated through the frequency of its use in a number of media during the Second World War, often as an airman’s sole identifying symbol.

While the uniform was used frequently as an identification symbol, the Service Dress also characterised its wearers as confidently-relaxed glamorous professionals. Feature films from *The Lion Has Wings* to *The Way Ahead* dressed their aviator characters in Service Dress to this end, with the uniform continuing in use after the war’s end.²⁰ In the latter film’s case, the briefly-appearing ‘Buster’, a Sergeant pilot played by Jack Watling that the protagonists encounter while training to be infantrymen, exemplifies this uniform’s role in identifying and characterising RAF aviators. The brief scene where Buster appears centres around a conversation between him the squaddies. After soldiers bemoan their ill fortune at having a demanding Sergeant, Buster humbles them by jokingly dismissing the wound that earned him the leave that the protagonists previously envied.²¹ Although brief, the composition of the scene’s principle shot, included as Figure 2.3, strongly reflects Reed’s intentions. By placing them side-by-side, the viewer is compelled to draw comparisons between Buster’s Service Dress and the battledress worn by James Donald’s character on the left. The uniform’s

¹⁸ Hickman, *What did you do in the War, Auntie?* (1995) p. 94

¹⁹ ‘Merry-Go-Round (Air Force Edition)’, 17 January 1944, Ref. No. T8922, British Library.

²⁰ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939); Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944).

²¹ Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944).

symbolic value is also evidenced by protagonists' wordless understanding of Buster's employment. Instead of a character stating for the benefit of the audience that Buster is a pilot, viewers are expected to recognise his service and role from his clothing.



Fig. 2.3. “Well, shot up a bit...” Jack Watling as Buster in *The Way Ahead*, 1944.²²

The scene from *The Way Ahead* also emphasises the Service Dress uniform's attributes of professional stylishness, modernity and masculine confidence. Buster's relaxed pose with hands resting in his pockets and his smiling demeanour echo his carefree tone of speech, lending his character a breezy confidence strikingly different from the squaddies' irritated, complaining personalities. Simultaneously, the backdrop of candelabra, carriage clock, nymph statue and other expensive ephemera adorning the mantelpiece all combine to reinforce the exquisitely-groomed character's regal air. A similar effect was utilised in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*'s ornately-decorated Officer's Mess setting, examined in Chapter One and included as Figure 1.6.²³ Likewise, John Boulting laboriously recreated a Cambridge University college dining hall at Pinewood Studios for the Pilot Cadets' mess setting in his 1944 film *Journey Together*.²⁴ This depiction of the confident, relaxed, glamorous aviator set against a mantelpiece backdrop was certainly popular, evidenced by cartoonist Joseph Lee's replication in Figure 3.5.²⁵

²² Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944).

²³ Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

²⁴ 'The Gen No 18', September 1945, Ref. No. GEN 18, Imperial War Museums Collections.

²⁵ Joseph Lee, 'Smiling Through: Point of View', 14 July 1942, *Evening News* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. JL2137).



Fig. 2.4. Wing Commander Guy Gibson (left) and his crew in July 1943.²⁶



Fig. 2.5. Fighter pilots are briefed in the *Picture Post* article 'An RAF Fighter Sweep Goes Over', July 1942.²⁷

Reality often influenced propagandised RAF aviators' uniforms. The Service Dress remained the RAF's principal uniform throughout the war, despite its unsuitability to the physically-taxing work of flying aircraft and its costly production requirements. By December 1940, to ease the mounting economic pressure, the RAF augmented the earlier Service Dress with the new serge 'Suit, aircrew', later re-named 'War Service Dress', exhibited in Figure 2.4, based on the Army's Battledress.²⁸ The War Service Dress was often featured in propaganda during the conflict's second half, but never entirely replaced the Service Dress as the stereotypical RAF aviator's uniform. Owing to the Service Dress's continuing popular recognition, it was only in material depicting real aviators that the War Service Dress frequently appeared. Examples of these include such photographs as Figure 2.4 and newsreels as 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England', examined in Chapter One.²⁹ However, these appearances did not totally eclipse those of the earlier uniform, exemplified in Figure 2.5, the *Picture Post*'s article 'An RAF Fighter Sweep Goes Over', depicting numerous RAF personnel clad both Service and War Service Dress.³⁰ This variety in clothing cannot simply be attributed to the privileges of rank, with both Service and War Service Dress alike being worn by officers

²⁶ 'Wing Commander Guy Gibson, VC, DSO and BAR, DFC and BAR, Commander of 617 Squadron (Dambusters) at Scampton, Lincolnshire, 22 July 1943', Ref. No. TR 1127, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (TR 1127), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

²⁷ "'This Is What We're Going to Do": Fighter Pilots are Briefed for an Offensive Sweep', 11 July 1942, *Picture Post*, p. 5 (accessed in Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection, 'Scrapbook – "My Aeroplane Scrap Book 1943-44" By Rosemary Arnold', Accession No. 2010/074.1).

²⁸ Cormack, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45* (1990) p. 35.

²⁹ Ibid; 'New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England', 1941, Pathé Gazette.

³⁰ "'This Is What We're Going to Do": Fighter Pilots are Briefed for an Offensive Sweep', 11 July 1942, *Picture Post*, p. 5 (accessed in Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection, 'Scrapbook – "My Aeroplane Scrap Book 1943-44" By Rosemary Arnold', Accession No. 2010/074.1). This story also features as the focus of the Pathé Gazette newsreel segment 'Fighter Sweeps', 1942, Pathé Gazette.

in the depiction. The distribution of uniforms, therefore, must be attributed to both aviators' personal preferences and the vagaries of war.

To protect the its aviators' uniforms from wear and tear, the RAF produced a wide range of clothing for aviators to use while flying. The variety in flying suits was such that, although they were produced in significant numbers, many appeared so infrequently in propaganda material that examining each of them here would be of little benefit. However, one suit, the 1930 and later 1940 Pattern 'Sidcot', named after its designer Sidney Cotton and pictured in Figure 2.6, regularly featured in RAF aviators' propaganda representations. The bulky one-piece cotton overall was distinguishable from its contemporaries by its light khaki colour, with interchangeable fur collars and linings of varying thicknesses. Later 'Sidcot' versions incorporated wiring to support electrically-heated gauntlets and boots, increasing their insulation capabilities.³¹



Fig. 2.6. A 1930 pattern 'Sidcot' Flying Suit, with fur collar attached.³²



Fig. 2.7. The "heroes of [the] Heligoland air battle" stroll past their aircraft in 'Sidcots', in *The Second Great War: A Standard History*'s eleventh issue, March 1940.³³

The 'Sidcot' saw widespread use in propaganda during the conflict's first two years, particularly in 1939. Depictions of RAF pilots and aircrew across multiple media often utilised the suit. David Low portrayed fighter pilots clad in 'Sidcots' awaiting aircraft in his June 1940 cartoon 'Waiting List', and the AM released a photograph of bomber crews "who proved their

³¹ Cormack, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45* (1990) p. 35.

³² 'Flying Suit, 1930 Pattern 'Sidcot': RAF', 1941, Ref. No. EQU 4015, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (EQU 4015), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

³³ 'Airmen who Proved their Worth: Heroes of Heligoland Air Battle', 11 March 1940, in *The Second Great War: A Standard History*, No. 11, pp. 420-421 (accessed in Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection, Accession No. 2011/256.2).

worth” in the Battle of Heligoland Bight wearing the suit alongside their aircraft, included as Figure 2.7.³⁴ Exemplifying the suit’s frequent use, one the photograph of an aviator was used in multiple posters, including one encouraging prospective RAF recruits to ‘Volunteer for Flying Duties’, and another for promoting WAAF recruitment on the promise of working “with the men who fly”.³⁵ These depictions of anonymous, if not fictional, pilots wearing the ‘Sidcot’ were complemented by those of famous pilots such as Douglas Bader sporting the garment whilst posing alongside their aircraft.³⁶

Reflecting its operational use, the ‘Sidcot’ faded out of propaganda use after the Second World War’s opening stages. After 1940, appearances of the ‘Sidcot’ began a steep decline in prevalence, and after mid-1943, its use in any propaganda medium, both factual and fictional, was a rarity. An analysis of 13 digitised wartime Pathé newsreel stories showing aviators wearing ‘Sidcots’ revealed that 12 were screened between 1939 and 1943.³⁷ Fictional portrayals of aviators experienced a similar change. The suit featured prominently in *The Lion Has Wings*’ bombing scene, with all but one of the BC aviators wearing ‘Sidcots’.³⁸ As the war went on, however, the suit faded from cinematic use, continuing to appear in *The Big Blockade*, but only briefly clothing one main character, Earnshaw, in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* and entirely absent from *The First of the Few*.³⁹ By the war’s end, *Journey Together* depicted its protagonist David Wilton wearing a ‘Sidcot’ during training scenes, to be swiftly replaced by an Irvin Suit when he enters combat, exhibited in Figure 2.11.⁴⁰ Similarly, *The Way to the Stars* only used the suit to clothe the minor character of AG Sergeant Clark in the film’s early-war scenes, supplanted in later scenes by an Irvin Suit, seen in Figure 2.13.⁴¹

³⁴ David Low, ‘Waiting List’, 14 June 1940, *Evening Standard* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. DL1629).

³⁵ ‘Volunteer for Flying Duties’, 1939-1945, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 3774, Imperial War Museums Collections; ‘Serve in the WAAF with the Men Who Fly’, 1941, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 3096, Imperial War Museums Collections.

³⁶ ‘The Battle of Britain 1940’, September 1940, Ref. No. CH 1406, Imperial War Museums Collections.

³⁷ These 13 newsreel segments, all produced by and accessed on British Pathé, are ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’, 6 November 1939, Ref. No. 1027.17; ‘RAF Heroes of the Sylt Raid’, 28 March 1940, Ref. No. 1039.48; ‘With the Air Force’, 5 September 1940, Ref. No. 1055.27; ‘RAF Fighters in Close Up’, 7 October 1940, Ref. No. 1164.06; ‘Hot Moments at a Fighter Station’, 17 October 1940, Ref. No. 1057.49; ‘Bombers and Gunners in the Making’, 31 October 1940, 1059.34; ‘Hurricanes to Smite the Italians’, 26 December 1940, Ref. No. 1065.10; ‘Bomber Squadron of our Allies’, 24 March 1941, Ref. No. 1109.42; ‘WAAFs at Work’, 9 June 1941, Ref. No. 1117.09; ‘RAF Bomb Paris Works’, 9 March 1942, Ref. No. 1320.04; ‘Liberators in Action’, 3 August 1942, Ref. No. 1334.01; ‘Terror from the Skies’, 20 August 1942, Ref. No. 1334.27; ‘Many Happy Returns - 25th Anniversary of R.A.F.’, 1 April 1943, Ref. No. 1077.23.

³⁸ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

³⁹ Frend, *The Big Blockade* (1942); Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942); Howard, *The First of the Few* (1942).

⁴⁰ Boulting, *Journey Together* (1945).

⁴¹ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

Two factors influenced the ‘Sidcot’'s disappearance from propaganda. Firstly, during this period, the suit was being replaced in BC by the more modern Irvin Suit, Figure 2.8.⁴² This transition, hastened by the high turnover rate of bomber crews, was reflected in footage of real aviators.⁴³ The second contribution to this transformation was the Battle of Britain. Fêted by the MoI throughout the Second World War as the conflict's turning-point, the battle's occurrence during the later stages of one of the warmest summers recorded in British history significantly influenced the garb of its RAF combatants.⁴⁴ Accordingly, the propagandised RAF fighter pilot wearing only a Service Dress under his lifejacket swiftly replaced that of his ‘Sidcot’-enveloped predecessor, regardless of the season in which it was produced.⁴⁵ The decline of the ‘Sidcot’, therefore, was the rise of the distinction between bomber and fighter pilots. While pre-1942 depictions of both utilised the ‘Sidcot’ as an identifying symbol of the generic RAF pilot, later representations of FC and BC aviators were distinguished by the use of either lightweight clothing indicating fighter pilots, or thick, insulating clothing representing their bomber counterparts.



Fig. 2.8. Squadron Leader Humphrey Lloyd Warren's Irvin Suit jacket.⁴⁶

Identifiable by its dark brown leather outer layer and creamy fleece lining, the Irvin Suit appears most frequently in images depicting BC and CC aircrew, with fighter pilots only infrequently wearing the suit in propaganda. Consisting of a jacket, Figure 2.8, and trousers, both made of sheepskin-lined brown leather, the suit was intended for much the same purpose

⁴² Cormack, *The Royal Air Force, 1939-45* (1990) p. 23.

⁴³ At above 72%, BC's casualty rate was the highest "of any Allied unit", and only a quarter of RAF bomber crews survived a 'Tour' of 30 operations intact. Turnover of personnel was accordingly frequent, with roles vacated by casualties requiring filling by replacement crewmembers, each bringing new clothing with them. 'History of Bomber Command', International Bomber Command Centre (accessed on www.internationalbcc.co.uk 4 January 1944).

⁴⁴ 'June 1940. – Exceptionally sunny; notably warm, dry', *Monthly Weather Report for the Meteorological Office*, Vol. 57 No. 6, 24 July 1940, p. 1 (accessed on www.metoffice.gov.uk).

⁴⁵ Rood, 'A Brief History of Flying Clothing', 2014, p. 22.

⁴⁶ 'Jacket, Flying, Thermally Insulated ('Irvin Suit'): Royal Air Force', 1939-1945, Ref. No. UNI 5800, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (UNI 5800), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

as the ‘Sidcot’. However, the lack of interchangeable liners and collars, along with its bulkier materials, made the newer outfit better suited to those flying in aircraft with larger cockpits for longer durations, such as bombers and transport aircraft, than smaller fighter aircraft.⁴⁷



Fig. 2.9. “Brave yet cautious, cool yet daring.” BC pilots in *Bomber Command*, 1941.⁴⁸

[Image redacted
in digital version]

Fig. 2.10. “The R.A.F. Instructor” stands grimy but confident in his Irvin Suit jacket in ‘Fly With the RAF’, May 1941.⁴⁹

The Irvin Suit’s bulky appearance showcased its wearers’ hardy professionalism and dedication to their work, frequently appearing in visual depictions of real airmen in operational settings. These include many of the illustrations in the AM book on the titular service, *Bomber Command*, “the lay-out, choice of photographs and general production of” which BC’s Commander-in-Chief Air Marshal Richard Peirse thanked the MoI’s Head of Publications Division Robert Fraser for.⁵⁰ One example is included as Figure 2.9, wherein a Pilot and Second Pilot are shown dressed for action in their aircraft wearing Irvin Suits, lifejackets and flying helmets, with the picture’s caption describing them as “brave yet cautious, cool yet daring.”⁵¹ BC and CC aircrew regularly appeared in propaganda wearing Irvin Suits, whose bulk reflected the hardships of their long, cold and arduous operations. By associating them with this kind of work, the suit painted its wearers’ as tough, capable and professional, contrasting sharply with the glamorous, almost dandy Service Dress wearers of FC. However, this association was not exclusive, with other Commands shown wearing the suit when its

⁴⁷ Rood, ‘A Brief History of Flying Clothing’, 2014, p. 28.

⁴⁸ ‘Pilot and second pilot- “Brave yet cautious, cool yet daring”’ in Air Ministry, *Bomber Command* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1941) p. 10 (accessed in Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection, Accession No. 2018/152.6).

⁴⁹ Extract from Air Ministry Information Bureau, ‘Fly with the RAF’, 14 May 1941, *The Times*, p. 7 (accessed on The Times Digital Archive, supplied courtesy of Times Newspapers Limited).

⁵⁰ Richard Peirse, Letter to Robert Fraser, 15 October 1941, Ref. No. H 87/1, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

⁵¹ ‘Pilot and second pilot- “Brave yet cautious, cool yet daring”’ in Air Ministry, *Bomber Command* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1941) p. 10 (accessed in Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection, Accession No. 2018/152.6).

attributes were required, exemplified by Training Command's appearance in a May 1941 edition of 'Fly with the RAF', shown in Figure 2.10.⁵² This association between the suit and BC and CC crews originates from the suit's use by these commands' real members. However, it was also encouraged by its increasing use in these aviators' fictional depictions such as feature films, exemplified by *Journey Together*, with the two principal characters wearing the suit for the film's final third Figure 2.11.⁵³ RAF personnel often jocularly acknowledged their bulky and overloaded appearance when wearing the Irvin Suit. In an illustration from the RAF's internally-distributed magazine *Tee Emm*, Figure 2.12, the hapless cartoon hero Pilot Officer Prune, laden with flying and emergency equipment, is likened to a Christmas tree at which a host of Air Training Corps cadets marvel.⁵⁴



Fig. 2.11. Jack Watling and Richard Attenborough in *Journey Together*, 1945.⁵⁵

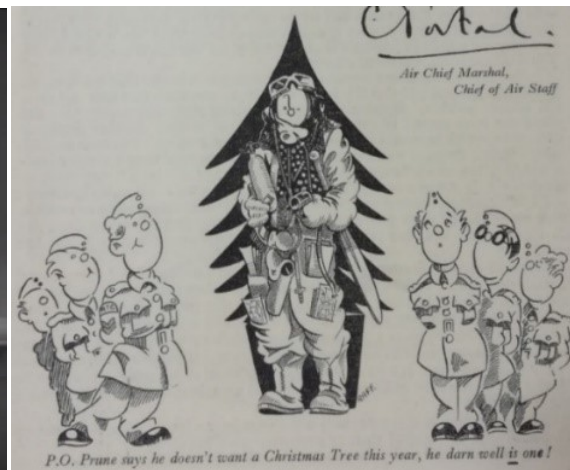


Fig. 2.12. Pilot Officer Prune adorned with equipment in *Tee Emm*'s Christmas 1942 edition.⁵⁶

Propagandised bomber crews' bulky Irvin Suits and Fighter pilots' well-tailored Service Dress uniforms were both differentiated and imbued their wearers with their relevant attributes of hardiness and stylishness. These differing costumes and their corresponding characteristics are exemplified in comparisons of feature film scenes. *The Way Ahead* and *The Way to the Stars* provide these scenes, included as Figures 2.3 and 2.13, where fictional aviators of each Command are depicted in social settings.⁵⁷

⁵² Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 14 May 1941, *The Times*, p. 7.

⁵³ Boulting, *Journey Together* (1945)

⁵⁴ William Hooper, 'P.O. Prune Says He Doesn't Want a Christmas Tree This Year, He Darn Well is One!', January 1942, *Tee Emm*, p. 1 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, Ref. No. Misc 21/9).

⁵⁵ Boulting, *Journey Together* (1945) (© IWM – Still taken from film (APY 26, Reel 8, 03:44), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

⁵⁶ Hooper, 'P.O. Prune Says He Doesn't Want a Christmas Tree This Year', 1942, *Tee Emm*, p. 1 (supplied care of the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives).

⁵⁷ Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944); Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).



Fig. 2.13. John Mills as Penrose, and Bill Owen as AG 'Nobby' Clarke in *The Way to the Stars*.⁵⁸

In Figure 2.13, bomber crewmembers Peter Penrose and Bill Owen are presented in a much harder, more practical light in *The Way to the Stars* than their cinematic fighter counterparts, exemplified by Buster from *The Way Ahead* in Figure 2.3. The characters' Irvin Suit jackets hint much more directly at the realities of their trade than their counterpart's Service Dress uniform, despite completely obscuring all insignia denoting rank or role. Simultaneously, their composure, although as confident as Buster's, hints at more grounded personalities, and their hair, roughly arranged when compared to the fighter pilot's, reveals their recent arrival from an operation. However, the scene is far from devoid of class implications. The cravat worn by John Mills's character Peter Penrose combines with the characters' drinks, whiskey and tea respectively, to distinguish Penrose, an officer, from his non-commissioned companion. Accordingly, despite their separation, propaganda depictions of fighter pilots and bomber crews retained many common attributes, with the 'Sidcot's' replacement by the Irvin Suit merely adding new attributes to those already existing.

The Irvin Suit's popularity as a visual identifier of RAF aircrew is testified by its continued appearances in a variety of media following the war's end. One example of the suit's immediate-post-war, and therefore post-MoI-influence, use is Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death*, wherein the protagonist Peter Carter spends much of his time on screen wearing an Irvin Suit, including both the opening and closing scenes of the film.⁵⁹ The suit makes repeated appearances throughout the film and in many others, clearly indicating that it had transcended its original use as a propaganda tool, becoming an intrinsic element of the RAF aviator's public image. This evidence of integration into the public consciousness, however subtle, also indicates the original propaganda's success. By Jowett and O'Donnell's

⁵⁸ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

⁵⁹ Powell & Pressburger, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946).

definition, propaganda is a process that, among other things, aims “to shape perceptions”, the continued association between Irvin Suits and RAF bomber aircrew implies a shaping of the British public’s perception of the aviators.⁶⁰ Therefore, the wartime propaganda that encouraged this association between clothing and role was clearly effective in its task.

Smaller Symbols

In conjunction with larger items of clothing, smaller visual symbols were frequently used to identify and characterise RAF personnel and their roles within the service. The symbols examined in this section numbered among many more, and were selected based on the frequency of their propaganda use. These symbols are: ‘wings’ brevets, shoulder patches, ‘Mae West’ lifejackets, and flying helmets. These items were all components of RAF uniform and flying equipment. However, they were frequently depicted independently from, and their recognition often transcended, their attached clothing sets, and frequently included in propaganda images even when they were unnecessary or detrimental to the real aviators depicted. Both cloth patches sown onto Service and War Service Dress jackets, ‘Wings’ brevets identified aviators’ roles and shoulder patches emphasised the RAF’s national diversity. Flying equipment such as the ‘Mae West’ lifejacket and flying helmet emphasised their wearers’ readiness for action, while the latter also identified an aviator’s bust and, where necessary, hid their individual identity from the audience. Although all featured regularly in aviators’ propaganda representations, the ‘wings’ brevets were foremost among these symbols.



Fig. 2.14. A Pilot’s ‘wings’ brevet.⁶¹



Fig. 2.15. An AG’s half-brevet ‘wing’.⁶²

⁶⁰ Jowett & O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2006) p. 7.

⁶¹ ‘Badge, Trade, British, Pilot’s Wings, Royal Air Force’, 1939-1945, Ref. No. INS 7330, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (INS 7330), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

⁶² ‘Badge, Trade, British, Royal Air Force, Air Gunner Half Brevet’, 1939-1945, Ref. No. INS 7331, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (INS 7331), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

‘Wings’ brevets were actively promoted by Britain’s propagandists throughout the Second World War as symbols denoting RAF aviators’ occupations and emphasising their specialist training. Following the traditions of the RFC, the RAF recognised individual aircrew roles through brevet patches worn on the Service and War Service Dress jackets’ left breast. These took the form of either two outstretched bird’s wings for a Pilot as in Figure 2.14, or a single wing, Figure 2.15, denoting non-pilot roles in multi-person aircraft. Both were embroidered in white silk, emanating from bronze laurels surrounding white letters indicating the wearer’s service in the case of Pilots, or their role in acronym form for non-pilots. Named for their shape, ‘wings’ brevets were popularly recognised both within and outside of the RAF, evidenced by their appearances in popular culture, including Thomas Somerfield likening them to RAF officers’ winged moustaches in *Punch*, August 1918.⁶³

During the Second World War, a wider variety of ‘wings’ brevets specific to aircrew roles were produced and their symbolic value increased exponentially, thanks in part to their promotion by the AM. With the increasing size of bombers, the typical aircrew was no longer simply a Pilot and his Observer. Exemplifying this expansion, Avro’s fêted Lancaster bomber required a crew of seven, each with their own specially-trained skillset, for the average bombing operation. The new ‘wings’, modelled on the earlier Observer’s brevet, were introduced throughout the war, beginning with AG, Figure 2.15, in December 1939 and ending with Meteorological Officer, signified by an ‘M’, in April 1945.⁶⁴ In many cases their introduction was announced to the public in newspaper articles, with *The Times* publishing an article on the AG brevet’s introduction, complete with information on the wearers’ qualifications, the brevet’s construction, and accompanying photograph.⁶⁵ This publicity implies that the RAF desired recognition for the wearers not only within the service, but among the broader public.

‘Wings’ brevets’ promotion was highly effective, leading to them gaining widespread public recognition. Roald Dahl, at this time an RAF fighter pilot, recalled two incidents in his memoir *Going Solo* in which the ‘wings’ on his jacket acted as “a great passport” in London during 1941, both occurring during the same night.⁶⁶ The first instance was impressing a hotel owner into using her telephone, the second was deterring a group of “drunken soldiers...

⁶³ Thomas Somerfield, ‘The Growth of Decorations...’, 21 August 1918, *Punch*, p. 124 (accessed on Punch Historical Archive).

⁶⁴ Cormack, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45* (1990) p. 7.

⁶⁵ ‘New Badge for Air Gunners’, 1940, *Times*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Dahl, *Going Solo* (1986) p. 207.

searching for an officer to beat up.”⁶⁷ Dahl attributed this recognition to the publicising of fighter and bomber pilots’ activities, and the brevity of his short explanation, implies that the brevet’s significance was indeed common knowledge in wartime Britain.⁶⁸ By contrast, James Storrar, a Hurricane pilot during the Battle of Britain, wrote to his mother about the amusement he felt at the reactions he received from non-RAF personnel while on leave in London. Upon his appearance at the Euston Hotel, Storrar wrote that “Army Captains look upon my dirty tunic & hat... with disgust and two waiters titter about something in my dress”.⁶⁹ However, it was “honestly amusing to meet people and be introduced as a fighter pilot, the different reactions are amazing”.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the British public’s differing reactions to RAF aviators are attributable to the appearance of their uniforms. While smartly-dressed pilots with visible ‘wings’ brevets such as Dahl received positive reactions from the public, those whose dress was too untidy for identification as pilots received derision and scorn.

Popular recognition of the Pilot’s ‘wings’ brevet is reflected in a variety of propaganda media. These include one of the AM’s ‘Fly with the RAF’ advertisements published in February 1941, in which it is claimed that “you [the reader] know” RAF pilots “by “The Wings” on their tunics”.⁷¹ Further evidence of the ‘wings’ brevet’s recognition are identifiable in the insignia’s frequent use in propaganda and commercial material. These include two posters in the MoI’s series ‘Keep Mum, She’s Not so dumb!’ In one, an RAF Sergeant is plied for information by his female companion, with the ‘AG’ on his half-brevet delicately legible despite the rough brushstrokes used throughout the artwork.⁷² In the second poster, Figure 2.16, officers of the three services crowd around an elegant woman, the only feature distinguishing the RAF officer from his compatriots being his uniform’s colour and ‘wings’.⁷³ Two Cardinals Luxury Coffee similarly included the brevet in their poster, Figure 2.17, featuring a smiling RAF pilot wearing Service Dress with visible ‘wings’ brevet.⁷⁴ The ‘wings’ brevet also appears in newspaper advertisements for *Fighter Pilot*, Paul Richey’s anonymous Battle of France memoir, with the insignia also featuring prominently on the book’s cover.⁷⁵ Other book covers

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 207, 209.

⁶⁸ Dahl, *Going Solo* (1986) p. 207.

⁶⁹ James Storrar, Letter to Mother, 1940, Ref. No. X005-4835/002, Royal Air Force Museum Archive, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Air Ministry Information Bureau, ‘Fly with the RAF’, 18 February 1941, *The Times*, p. 7.

⁷² ‘Keep Mum - She’s Not So Dumb! - Careless Talk Costs Lives’, 1939-1945, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 13908, Imperial War Museums Collections.

⁷³ Ibid, 1942, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 4095, Imperial War Museums Collections.

⁷⁴ Two Cardinals Coffee, ‘Two Cardinals Luxury Coffee is Delicious’, 1939-1945, Museum of Brands.

⁷⁵ ‘Fighter Pilot’, 30 August 1941, *The Times*, p. 2; Paul Richey, *Fighter Pilot*, 4 ed. (London: B.T. Batsford, 1941) cover.

utilising the brevet include Leslie Kark's novels *The Fire Was Bright* and *Red Rain*.⁷⁶ Similarly, the MoI's internationally-distributed children's picture book *Britain's Royal Air Force* began beneath a large colour illustration of a pilot's brevet.⁷⁷



Fig. 2.16. 'Keep Mum – She's Not So Dumb!', 1942.⁷⁸



Fig. 2.17. A pilot enjoys a cup of coffee in a Two Cardinals Luxury Coffee advertisement.⁷⁹

Cinema, however, presents the most prominent recognition of the 'wings' brevet's symbolic power. Although aviation films produced in the war's formative years merely included the brevet as a part of their actors' costumes, later films came to place great emphasis on the brevet as a symbol of the characters' occupation.⁸⁰ Exemplifying this is Buster, the RAF fighter pilot briefly included in *The Way Ahead* as a token emblem of his service.⁸¹ In every shot depicting the character, exemplified in Figure 2.3, his 'wings' are clearly visible, constantly reminding the audience of his coveted role within his already-glorified service. This careful inclusion is echoed in a brief shot from the sergeant's mess scene in *One of Our Aircraft*

⁷⁶ Leslie Kark, *The Fire was Bright* (London: Macmillan, 1943) cover; Leslie Kark, *Red Rain* (London: Macmillan, 1945) cover.

⁷⁷ Anonymous, *Britain's Royal Air Force* (London: Ministry of Information, 1943) p. 1 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, Ref. No. Embleton 1/5/3).

⁷⁸ 'Keep Mum - She's Not So Dumb! - Careless Talk Costs Lives', 1942, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 4095, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (Art.IWM PST 4095), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

⁷⁹ Two Cardinals Coffee, 'Two Cardinals Luxury Coffee is Delicious', 1939-1945, Museum of Brands.

⁸⁰ See Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939) as an example of early-war aviation propaganda, in which little to no emphasis is placed upon the pilot's 'wings' on the two lead actors' uniforms.

⁸¹ Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944).

is Missing, included in Chapter One as Figure 1.8, wherein the ‘wings’ of the Sergeant Pilot leaning against the radio are clearly visible at the bottom of the image.⁸² Joseph Lee also utilised this careful framing in his cartoon ‘Smiling Through: Point of View’, included as Figure 3.5. Although the central character’s left arm is raised in an apparently casual manner, it is angled just low enough for the artist to include the his ‘wings’ in the image.⁸³



Fig. 2.18. “I thought you said you weren’t a flier?” Joe Friselli notices Peter Penrose’s ‘wings’ brevet in *The Way to the Stars*.⁸⁴

A similar reverence is placed upon the ‘wings’ brevet in cinema, with characters in *The Way to the Stars* wordlessly acknowledging their symbolic value. When encountering RAF bomber pilot-turned-controller Peter Penrose in *The Way to the Stars*, American bomber crewmember Joe Friselli, played by Bonar Colleano, initially takes him for a non-flying officer. This assumption is based on Penrose not wearing his War Service Dress jacket and his introducing himself as a controller and “not a flier”.⁸⁵ Friselli proceeds to loudly elucidate on his untested expertise in bombing and the qualities of his aircraft. Penrose, meanwhile, takes his coat down from the hook on which it was hanging, and Friselli stops short as he notices the ‘wings’ just visible to the audience on the jacket’s left breast, exhibited in Figure 2.18. Friselli’s tone changes immediately to one of apologetic respect, and humble, faintly-dumbfoundedly, enquires into Penrose’s experience as a pilot.⁸⁶ The brief interaction between Friselli and Penrose, like the scene examined in Chapter One, was clearly aimed to bring a form of

⁸² Powell & Pressburger, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

⁸³ Joseph Lee, ‘Smiling Through: Point of View’, 14 July 1942, *Evening News* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. JL2137).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Schadenfreude to the British public, playing on their widespread irritation with the ‘over-paid, over-sexed and over here’ American servicemen based in their country. The scene also proves the brevet’s power as a symbol independent of the RAF’s uniform, for unlike Buster’s *The Way Ahead*, Penrose’s ‘wings’ remain either out of focus or partially obscured throughout the scene. Regardless, instant audience recognition is expected of Friselli’s wordless indication to the brevet’s location, just as the brevet’s symbolic value goes unexplained yet remains pivotal to the dialogue.



Fig. 2.19. “May I?” Wilton brushes Aynesworth’s ‘wings’ in *Journey Together*.⁸⁷

While incidental inclusions such as these in both film and print were not uncommon, the RAFFPU went one step further. Under the direction of John Boulting, the Unit’s 1945 film *Journey Together* dug into the perceived elitism of pilots, and dedicated the entire film to promoting the value of non-pilot aircrew, with particular emphasis on the role of Navigator. The film tells the story of two fictional RAF trainees, David Wilton and John Aynesworth, both hoping to become pilots. Wilton fails in his endeavour and instead becomes a Navigator, while Aynesworth achieves his goal, much to the envy of the Wilton, until both come to cooperate and accept the equal importance of Navigator and Pilot. Wilton’s initial envy is communicated most effectively in a largely non-verbal scene in a Canadian hotel bar, where Aynesworth takes off his greatcoat to expose the new ‘wings’ on his Service Dress. After a moment of tense silence, Wilton shows his support for Aynesworth’s achievement by offering to brush his wings to reduce their dazzle, shown in Figure 2.19. Throughout this brief, but tense scene, the brevet

⁸⁷ Boulting, *Journey Together* (1945) (© IWM – Still taken from film (APY 26, Reel 5, 08:20), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

dominates as the object of conversation, both spoken and unspoken, with great emphasis placed on its coveted status and symbolism.



Fig. 2.20. Two forms of shoulder titles worn by overseas pilots serving in the RAF.⁸⁸

Shoulder patches are another example of cloth insignia featuring prominently in RAF aviators' propagandisation. While wings identified an aviator to an appreciative audience, shoulder patches identified his nationality, emphasising the RAF's diverse composition. Although Dominion and Empire aviators' propaganda appearances were examined in Chapter One, the service's diversity was also compounded by the influx of aviators from occupied continental Europe. While many occupied nations' air arms retained their administrative independence from the RAF, all, save for the Free French, adopted the RAF's uniform as their own.⁸⁹ Many made minor alterations to insignia, most common being the replacement of the RAF's 'wings' brevet with their own air forces' brevets. Despite their differences, however, all adopted the wearing of nationality-bearing shoulder patches, sewn onto their uniform jackets, similar in design to the British Army's regimental insignia.⁹⁰ These patches, produced for all major nationality groups serving in the RAF, presented the wearer's service or home country either in full, as in Figure 2.20, or in acronym, stitched in light blue or white thread on dark blue or black cloth. Introduced at intermittent stages across the conflict's duration, the patches came in a wide range of shapes and sizes, from single-line titles to the comparatively-ostentatious insignia worn by American Eagle Squadron pilots, pictured in Figure 2.21.⁹¹ Regardless of their format, however, all patches made the wearer's nationality abundantly

⁸⁸ 'Badge, Formation, Polish Air Force', 1939-1945, Ref. No. INS 4922, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (INS 4922), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections); 'Service Dress Uniform jacket, Flying Officer, Air Bomber', 1942-1945, Author's Personal Collection.

⁸⁹ Cormack, *The Royal Air Force 1939-45* (1990) p. 19.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 20-22.

⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 18-19.

clear. Even in the case of the Eagle Squadron patch, omitting written reference to the United States, it nonetheless clearly communicated national identity through a large embroidered replication of the country's national symbol. All shoulder patches were worn on the on the sleeve of the Service and War Service Dress jackets, immediately below the shoulder seam.

RAF personnel attached great sentimental value to their shoulder patches despite their innocuous size. 'Johnnie' Johnson, the English commander of Canadian 144 Wing from 1943 to 1945, was presented a pair by Leslie 'Syd' Ford, one of the Wing's Squadron Leaders, after his first operation with the unit. Johnson recalled Ford stating that "the boys would like you to wear these. After all, we're a Canadian wing and we've got to convert you."⁹² This action's "deep significance" to Johnson reflects the shoulder patches' extended symbolism beyond that of personal identity, for Johnson was not Canadian, to one of inclusivity and group identity.⁹³



Fig. 2.21. The reality: The American Eagle Squadrons' shoulder patch.⁹⁴

[Image redacted in digital version]

Fig. 2.22. The use: Squadron Leader W.E.G. Taylor's portrait in *The Times*, October 1940.⁹⁵

Shoulder patches, while not immediately noticeable to the disinterested eye, were frequently included in numerous propaganda media produced for the British public during the

⁹² Leslie Ford in J.E. Johnson, *Wing Leader* (London: The Reprint Society, 1958) p. 163.

⁹³ J.E. Johnson, *Wing Leader* (London: The Reprint Society, 1958).

⁹⁴ 'Insignia, Eagle Squadron, Royal Air Force', 1939-1942, Ref. No. A19761297000, National Air and Space Museum Collection, Smithsonian Institution (Photo by Mark Avino, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (NASM 2011-04366))

⁹⁵ Extract from 'Squadron-Leader W.E.G. Taylor' in 'The Prime Minister's Son Enters Parliament', 9 October 1940, *The Times*, p. 6 (accessed on The Times Digital Archive, supplied courtesy of Times Newspapers Limited).

Second World War. Among these media were newspaper articles, with international airmen serving in the RAF frequently promoted in photographs of specific individuals and their insignia. Exemplifying this is a small pictorial *Times* article on William Taylor, “the fighting commanding officer of the new R.A.F. Fighter squadron with all American pilots”, in which the subject is posed with his shoulder patch facing the camera, shown in Figure 2.22.⁹⁶ In many cases, however, these aviators appeared as anonymous members of a group, with their sole appearance being close-up shots of their shoulder patches, as exemplified in British Movietone’s November 1943 newsreel story ‘Battle of Berlin – New Phase Opens’.⁹⁷ Other stories utilising aviators’ shoulder patches in this manner include those covering the influx of immigrant RAF personnel from Empire Air Training Scheme facilities, often before their allocation to nationally-specific units under Article XV of the contentious “Ottawa agreement”.⁹⁸ The October 1941 British Movietone newsreel story ‘King and Queen with Empire Airmen’ exemplifies this theme.⁹⁹ As its title suggests, the story, also covered by Pathé Gazette under the title ‘Their Majesties and Airmen from Overseas’, shows King George VI and Queen Elizabeth inspecting foreign RAF personnel newly-arrived in Britain.¹⁰⁰ Most of the segment’s one minute length is dedicated to a sequence of shots focusing on selected personnel’s shoulder patches, exhibited in Figure 2.23. Aviators from Canada, Singapore, South Africa, the USA, New Zealand and Rhodesia receive the camera’s attention in turn, their national identifiers appearing in each shot’s centre, often at the expense of their owners’ faces.

Originally intended as a political concession to overseas governments’ requests for increased autonomy within the RAF, the shoulder patch’s frequent centre-stage appearances reveal that its symbolic value extended beyond its simple cloth constitution. By focusing solely on the unnamed aviators’ shoulder patches, both ‘Battle of Berlin – New Phase Opens’ and ‘King and Queen with Empire Airmen’ eschew all of their subjects’ characteristics save for their nationalities, depicting them as simply their nations’ de facto ambassadors. Commonwealth military historians such as Jeffrey Grey have criticised their nations’ “disastrous” “surrender” of aviators to the RAF under the Empire Air Training Scheme and the subsequent reduction of Commonwealth air arms to “training organisation[s] for the

⁹⁶ ‘Squadron-Leader W.E.G. Taylor’ in ‘The Prime Minister’s Son Enters Parliament’, 9 October 1940, *The Times*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ ‘Battle of Berlin – New Phase Opens’, 29 November 1943, British Movietone News (accessed on www.aparchive.com, Ref. No. BM44297).

⁹⁸ Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, 3 ed. (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 151.

⁹⁹ ‘King and Queen With Empire Airmen’, 1941, British Movietone News.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Their Majesties and Airmen from Overseas’, 1941, Pathé Gazette.

RAF”.¹⁰¹ However, despite Arthur Harris’s disapproval, commonwealth and overseas aviators and their national insignia frequently served as useful propaganda tools in MoI and AM material, promoting the conflict’s global reach and Britain’s international support.¹⁰²

[Image redacted in digital version]

Fig. 2.23. Shots of aviators’ shoulder titles in ‘King and Queen With Empire Airmen’, 1941.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (2008) pp. 150-151.

¹⁰² Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (1947) p. 64.

¹⁰³ ‘King and Queen With Empire Airmen’, 1941, British Movietone News.

While ‘wings’ brevets indicated the wearer’s qualifications, and shoulder patches their national identity, the ‘Mae West’ lifejacket recalled the public to the dangers regularly faced by the island nation’s aviators, echoing the hardy characteristics imbued by the Irvin Suit. ‘Mae West’ lifejackets were commonly worn by RAF aviators of all commands throughout the Second World War, resulting from the extended periods of time they spent over water. At the conflict’s outbreak, the RAF’s standard-issue lifejacket was the 1932 Pattern.¹⁰⁴ Made of khaki cotton and orally inflated through a tube, the lifejacket is seen adorning RAF pilots during the Battle of Britain, often painted yellow to attract the attention of rescuers in the event of its use.¹⁰⁵ The later 1941 Pattern, Figure 2.24, was produced in yellow cotton with a compressed air cylinder for instant inflation.¹⁰⁶ The lifejacket’s “official” nickname of ‘Mae West’ stemmed from its shape when inflated, as, like the actress’s bosom, it “bulge[d] in the right places”.¹⁰⁷ In response to calls for the term’s entry into the Oxford Dictionary, *Tee Emm* printed a letter purportedly written by Mae West to the “Boys of the R.A.F.”, in which she expressed, along with several other sultry remarks, her pleasure at “the swell honour to have such great guys wrapped up in [her]”, and enquiring “has it got dangerous curves and soft shapely shoulders?”¹⁰⁸ Despite the letter’s sexually provocative wording, the magazine included the “sin-sationally” signed piece with the clear intention of promoting vigilance for safety measures among its readers, publishing it under the title of ‘Don’t Forget Your Mae west, She hasn’t Forgotten You!’¹⁰⁹



Fig. 2.24. A late model 1941 Pattern ‘Mae West’ lifejacket.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ ‘Life Preserver, 1932 Pattern: RAF’, 1932-1945, Ref. No. EQU 4629, Imperial War Museums Collections.

¹⁰⁵ Cormack, *The Royal Air Force, 1939-45* (1990) p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of R.A.F. Slang* (London: Michael Joseph, 1945) pp. 38, 9.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Don’t Forget Your May West, She Hasn’t Forgotten You!’, January 1942, *Tee Emm*, p. 7 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London, Ref. No. Misc 21/9).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ ‘Life Preserver, 1941 Pattern (Late Variant), ‘Mae West’: Royal Air Force’, 1941-1945, Ref. No. EQU 4018, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (EQU 4018), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).



Fig. 2.25. 257 Squadron Pilots pose with souvenirs looted from Italian bombers, November 1940.¹¹¹

The integration of the ‘Mae West’ into the RAF aviator’s propaganda image resulted from photographs and film taken at airfields, in manner akin to the Irvin Suit. Accordingly, they appear infrequently in propaganda depictions, and only in operational settings, either in or near their aircraft. While images of bomber crews in similar settings were dominated by Irvin Suits, depictions of fighter pilots frequently included lifejackets, with their nickname and its “often unkind” origin often clearly acknowledged, as in the MoI short film *Fighter Pilot*.¹¹² Giving their wearer an appearance of operational readiness, the lifejacket’s inclusion was a largely symbolic one, with many depictions lacking other essential flying equipment such as flying helmets, parachutes and oxygen masks, exemplified in Figure 2.25. These factual depictions spurred the inclusion of ‘Mae Wests’ in fictional images such as cartoons, primarily of fighter pilots. These are exemplified by Joseph Lee’s cartoon ‘Smiling Through: Rubber Saver’, in which an eager pilot is shown standing in front of his crashed aircraft, with his undone lifejacket reflecting his optimistic statement “One thing, Sir. My belly landings do save the tyres!”.¹¹³ While aviators’ photographic depictions appear to be incidentally-captured

¹¹¹ ‘The Battle of Britain 1940’, 1940, Ref. No. CH 1674, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (CH 1674), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections); this scene and these pilots also feature in the Pathé Gazette newsreel story ‘Italian Raiders Hurriganed!’, 18 November 1940, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1061.24).

¹¹² Gerald Sanger, *Fighter Pilot* (British Movietone News, 1940) (accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections, Ref. No. UKY 263).

¹¹³ Joseph Lee, ‘Smiling Through: Rubber Saver’, 6 October 1942, *Evening News* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. JL2209).

images, and their wearing of lifejackets accordingly a matter of factual representation, the AM and MoI's control over newsreel footage and press photographs indicates the 'Mae West's' symbolic inclusions were deliberate.¹¹⁴ However, many propaganda representations of operationally-ready aviators omit the lifejacket. These absences are traceable to the garment's size, covering the aviator's 'wings' brevet and Service Dress jacket. Accordingly, although the 'Mae West' lent an air of operational-readiness to the RAF fighter pilot, his stylish Service Dress and 'wings' were clearly deemed more valuable as recognisable symbols.

Just as the 'Mae West' disrupted a Service Dress jacket's tailored cut and covered its 'wings', flying helmets, goggles and oxygen masks often identified a propagandised aviator at the expense of his facial features. Like the lifejacket, depictions of aviators wearing flying helmets often featured real RAF personnel photographed in ostensibly factual situations. One example, showing two pilots wearing flying helmets, goggles and oxygen masks ostensibly discussing a recent dogfight, was used by *The Illustrated London News* as an page-long inside cover image at the Battle of Britain's height in August 1940.¹¹⁵ Many of these depictions gained significant popularity in the press, as was the case with Pilot Officer Keith Gillman's photograph. Gillman's image featured on multiple magazine covers, including those of *Picture Post* and *News Review* in August 1940, and was replicated by other pilots for propaganda purposes, exemplified in the 27 May 1941 version of 'Fly with the RAF', included in Figure 1.5.¹¹⁶ Later, his portrait saw extensive commercial use across the globe in commercial advertisements, including one by Silver Fern tobacco in New Zealand, included as Figure 2.26.¹¹⁷ Despite its popularity, Gillman's portrait frequently appears without attribution to him, being used instead, as was the case with many similar images, as an anonymous representation of an average RAF aviator. In Figure 2.26, for example, Gillman is depicted as a New Zealander, despite his real birthplace being Dover.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Luke McKernan, 'Film (Newsreels)' in Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert & David Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2003) p. 133.

¹¹⁵ 'Fighting His Battle Over Again', 31 August 1940, *The Illustrated London News*, p. 261.

¹¹⁶ Front Cover, 31 August 1940, *Picture Post*; Front Cover, 22 August 1940, *News Review*; Air Ministry Information Bureau, 'Fly with the RAF', 27 May 1941, *The Times*, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Silver Fern Cigarette Tobacco, 'Worthy Sons of New Zealand', *The Press*, 1 June 1943, p. 40.

¹¹⁸ 'The Airmen's Stories – P/O K R Gillman', Battle of Britain London Monument (accessed on www.bbm.org.uk 4 January 2019).



Fig. 2.26. A 1943 Silver Fern advertisement using Gillman's portrait, with an added cigarette dangling perilously close to his oxygen mask.¹¹⁹



Fig. 2.27. "King George VI Meets Pilots of Fighter Command" in one of the MoI's 'For Freedom' poster.¹²⁰

Evidence of the flying helmet's symbolic value is also found in a widely-publicised visit by King George VI to an unnamed airfield in April 1942.¹²¹ Footage of the King, wearing his Service Dress uniform, inspecting and conversing with Spitfire pilots, along with Spitfires taking off and flying overhead, was circulated to all major newsreel producers and newspapers. Following a report in *The Times* published the day after the visit, Pathé Gazette presented the story under the title of 'King Visits Fighter Pilots', *The Illustrated London News* published one photograph in under the headline 'The King Visits Fighter Pilots; Distinguished Overseas Visitors', and the MoI used another image in their 'For Freedom' poster series, included as Figure 2.27.¹²² Many of these publications, including Figure 2.27, drew from series of shots from the visit showing the King shaking hands and talking to pilots standing to attention in a

¹¹⁹ Silver Fern Cigarette Tobacco, 'Worthy Sons of New Zealand', *The Press*, 1 June 1943, p. 40 (accessed on Papers Past).

¹²⁰ 'King George VI Meets Pilots of Fighter Command', 1942-1945, Ref. No. 2017/131.7, Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection.

¹²¹ 'The King Talks to Fighter Pilots', 30 April 1942, *The Times*, p. 4.

¹²² Ibid; 'The King Visits Fighter Pilots', 4 May 1942, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1326.06); 'The King Greets Fighter Pilots; Distinguished Overseas Visitors', 9 May 1942, *The Illustrated London News*, p. 539; 'King George VI Meets Pilots of Fighter Command', 1942-1945, Ref. No. 2017/131.7, Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection.

single rank, all wearing flying helmets and ‘Mae Wests’ to emphasise their imminent departure “on a big raid” over occupied France, a purpose similar to that in ‘Cavalry of the Clouds’, analysed in Chapter One.¹²³ However, the aviators’ ear-enveloping flying helmets appear to have been some hinderance when talking to the King, a task made no easier by his standing down-wind from them in “a wind which at times attained gale force”.¹²⁴ In British Movietone’s newsreel story ‘King With Fighter Command’, many pilots are shown lifting their helmets’ ear flaps and craning their necks forward in their attempts to hear the King.¹²⁵ Despite these difficulties, all continue to wear their flying helmets throughout the inspection. Given the helmets’ superfluity under such circumstances, their continued use was presumably at the photographers’ insistence, evidencing the garment’s symbolic value trumping practical considerations in propaganda material’s production.

Factual depictions of flying helmets, goggles and oxygen masks encouraged their incorporation into depictions of fictional aviators, in a similar manner to the Irvin Suit and the ‘Mae West’. Poster artists, as in Figure 2.28, utilised the combination as a visual symbol indicating the wearer’s occupation as an aviator. Other examples, such as Figure 2.29, utilised the flying helmet as an aviator’s lone identification symbol to distinguish the character from his Army and Navy counterparts. While its incidental and symbolic inclusions were frequent, the flying helmet and mask combination was also worn in photographs by many aviators from occupied Europe, particularly the Free French. While not a symbolic usage, the mask’s ability to obscure the wearer’s facial features was utilised to disguise the exiled aviators’ identities from viewers in continental Europe, safeguarding their families against Gestapo reprisals.¹²⁶ This practice was mocked by Pathé in their newsreel story ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’ when describing the commonwealth pilots by compared them positively to the “mere untried youths afraid to show their feelings because of a lurking Gestapo.”¹²⁷ Presumably, companies such as Pathé preferred the heroic aviators’ faces in their newsreels to be visible and relatable, not hidden.

¹²³ ‘King George VI Meets Pilots of Fighter Command’, 1942-1945, Ref. No. 2017/131.7, Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection.

¹²⁴ ‘The King Talks to Fighter Pilots’, 1942, *Times*, p. 4.

¹²⁵ ‘King With Fighter Command – No Sound’, 4 May 1942, British Movietone News (accessed on www.britishmovietone.com, Ref. No. BM42244-2).

¹²⁶ Nesbit, *An Illustrated History of the R.A.F.* (1991) p. 157.

¹²⁷ ‘New Zealand Fighter Squadron in England’, 1941, Pathé Gazette.



Fig. 2.28. A British aviator, identified by flying helmet and goggles, urges aircraft production.¹²⁸



Fig. 2.29. The Labour Party appeals to those on the 'home front', with the three services represented in bust form.¹²⁹

Conclusions

The symbols examined in this chapter all contributed to the construction of the RAF aviator's propaganda image. Each possessed a unique quality that it imbued the wearer with and either identified them broadly as a member of the RAF, or as a specific member within one of the service's Commands. The homogenous 'Sidcot'-clad RAF aviator of the war's formative years, dressed for action, gave way to the distinct identities of Fighter and Bomber. The fighter pilot's well-tailored Service Dress uniform emphasised his exciting lifestyle and dashing persona, while the Bomber crewman's Irvin Suit emphasised his tough, dutiful personality resulting from his harsh, rugged work environment. However, the Irvin suit's traits were not confined to BC airmen, and were attributed to Fighter pilots by the occasional use of 'Mae West' lifejackets and flying helmets in their propaganda representations. Throughout this transition, however, 'wings' brevets retained their symbolic value as identifiers of specific, widely-publicised roles, distinguishing Pilots from AGs from non-flying RAF personnel, in a similar manner to flying helmets' use distinguishing RAF personnel from their Army and Navy contemporaries. While these symbols identified RAF personnel and imbued them with favourable attributes, shoulder patches were utilised to promote the RAF's national diversity, contributing to the broader MoI

¹²⁸ 'Is He Killing Time....Or Killing Nazis', 1939-1945, Ref. No. Art.IWM PST 14262, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (Art.IWM PST 14262), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

¹²⁹ 'Help them Finish their Job!: Give them Homes and Work! Vote Labour', 1939-1945, Ref. No. 88/051.10k, Air Force Museum of New Zealand Collection.

propaganda message of a 'United Nations' opposing fascism. These symbols were regularly exhibited by real RAF aviators, and their inclusion in propaganda could accordingly be dismissed as merely an imitation. However, their persistent usage and emphasis in depictions of both factual and fictional aviators indicates that these symbols' association with the idealised RAF aviator was encouraged by Britain's propagandists.

Furthermore, the distinction in clothing between the RAF fighter and bomber airmen is traceable solely to the influence of these propaganda sources. For, although the distinction appears in numerous media following the Battle of Britain, members of the public were unlikely to encounter an aviator on the street wearing full flying equipment. The public's entire perception of airmen on operations, therefore, was based upon information from official sources, provided or censored by the AM and MoI. Accordingly, these images' popularity in the public consciousness, as exemplified by their use in multiple cartoons, testify to the effectiveness of the MoI following its reorganisation under Brendan Bracken in 1941. The years of Bracken's influence saw dramatic changes to Britain's propaganda, coinciding with the distinguishing of Fighter and Bomber aviators in propaganda and the 'Sidcot's' replacement by the Service Dress and Irvin Suit.¹³⁰ Accordingly, this distinction, while resulting from the individual attention garnered by each command during the Battle of Britain as their nation's respective defenders and avengers, undoubtedly benefitted from Bracken's influence. Testifying to this division's effectiveness, the two separate identities of defensive "fighter types" and offensive "bomber boys" retained their popularity long after the conflict's end, each benefiting and suffering individually from their wartime propaganda identities.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Homefront Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979) p. 7.

¹³¹ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945); French, *Secret Mission* (1942).

Chapter Three: Activity and Relaxation

This Chapter examines the RAF aviator's propaganda image in greater detail than the previous chapters' analyses of themes and symbols, analysing its frequent association with the characteristics of youthful vigour and informality. Both attributes made frequent appearances in aviators' propaganda depictions across multiple media, examples of which are analysed throughout this chapter. References are made to the two traits' implications of class, sexual attractiveness and morals, and their presence highlighted by comparing the propagandised depictions of RAF aviators with those of non-RAF personnel. Although, as John Baxendale argues, national unity within 'the people's war' was a principle component of propaganda and social self-perception in wartime Britain, this concept was often emphasised in propaganda through depictions of characters "learning tolerance", as Jeffrey Richards put it.¹ The use of pre-existing prejudices in these narratives indicates that class divides remained omnipresent in the Britain's propaganda and public consciousness, and accordingly frequently impact on propaganda depictions of RAF aviators. Accordingly, the material examined in this chapter contains frequent allusions to class stereotypes, primarily those attributed to the upper classes, with each characteristic strongly influenced by these stereotypes. Where available, official memoranda is used to trace the origins of these characteristics' emphasis, revealing the processes behind RAF aviators' propagandisation and the influences of the AM, MoI, and RAF Commands on its creation.

Youthful Vigour

Throughout the second world war, RAF aviators were frequently depicted as energetic, vigorous and active youths. Numerous individuals fitting this stereotype were fêted by Britain's propagandists across multiple media, with great emphasis placed upon their daring, virility and aggressiveness. The "rather wild" Adrian Warburton was among these aviators, described by *The Times* as "one of the most daring and successful aerial photographers in the R.A.F."² Fighter pilot Douglas Bader also received significant attention from Britain's newspapers for

¹ John Baxendale, "You and I – All of us Ordinary People: Renegotiating 'Britishness' in Wartime" in Nick Hayes & Jeff Hill (eds.), *Millions Like Us? British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999) p. 322; Jeffrey Richards, 'National Identity in British Wartime Films' in Philip M. Taylor (ed.), *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) p. 58

² James Sanders, *Of Wind and Water: A Kiwi Pilot in Coastal Command* (Wellington: Mallinson Rendel, 1990) p. 71; 'Air Photographer Missing: Flew at 50 Feet over a Battleship', 21 November 1942, *The Times*, p. 2.

his aggressive work ethic and active lifestyle in spite of his disability.³ Reinforcing these individual promotions were depictions of aviators' work, all emphasising their active lifestyle. During the first half of the Second World War, the image of the 'scramble', pilots running to their aircraft to take off in as little time as possible, became popularly associated with fighter pilots. One particular shot showing aviators 'scrambling' appears in multiple films and newsreels, including Pathé's 'RAF Fighters in Close Up' and the 1940 MoI-sponsored short film *Fighter Pilot*.⁴ The shot, a still from which is included as Figure 3.1, shows pilots of 65 Squadron running for their aircraft before press photographers on the eve of war in 1939.⁵



Fig. 3.1. Spitfire pilots 'scramble' to their aircraft in *Fighter Pilot*, released 1940.⁶



Fig. 3.2. A fighter pilot runs for his aircraft on the *Daily Express* front page, June 1942.⁷

This active persona only increased in energy. Following the Battle of Britain, the depiction of aviators running in full flying equipment was swiftly replaced by that of lightly-clad aviators wearing only 'Mae Wests' above their Service or War Service Dress uniforms. Propagandists and media alike utilised this energetic image to good effect, with the *Daily Express* using it as a front page teaser in January 1942, included as Figure 3.2, to forecast the

³ 'Legless Air Ace a Prisoner: Wing Commander D.R.S. Bader, D.S.O. and Bar, D.F.C. and Bar', 23 August 1941, *The Illustrated London News*, p. 238.

⁴ 'RAF Fighters in Close Up', 1940, Pathé Gazette; Sanger, *Fighter Pilot* (1940).

⁵ The shot's origin is determined based on the aircraft's similarities to those in other pre-war official photographs of 65 Squadron, including 'Royal Air Force Aircraft Interwar Period', 1939, Ref. No. HU 1664, Imperial War Museums Collections; and their dissimilarity to other contemporary official photographs of Mk1 Spitfires, principally those of 19 Squadron in 'The Supermarine Spitfire, 1938', 31 October 1938, Ref. No. CH 19, Imperial War Museums Collections.

⁶ Sanger, *Fighter Pilot* (1940) (© IWM – Still taken from film (UKY 263, 00:57), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

⁷ 'Man in a Big Hurry', 11 June 1942, *Daily Express*, p. 1 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, Ref. No. Misc 64, supplied care of the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives).

accompanying story's energy and therefore interest to the reader.⁸ *The First of the Few* also replicates this image in its closing scenes, with Spitfire pilots shown sprinting for their aircraft wearing only 'Mae Wests', shirts, and trousers.⁹ As stated in Chapter Two, this image of the fighter pilot contrasted strongly with that of his bulkily-garbed bomber contemporary, significantly contributing to their distinction. The image of pilots running for their aircraft was, however, only one of multiple scenarios promoted in British propaganda showcasing the RAF airman's virility. Many of these images were taken from the selection and training process for RAF personnel, during which recruits' physical fitness was tested. Such reports include the Pathé newsreel story 'Test for Pilots' in which cadet aviators are shown running, swimming, and doing other taxing exercises as a part of their training in South Africa.¹⁰ The piece emphasises their work's strenuous nature and the resulting requirement for physical fitness, declaring "it's a tough test, but not too tough for South Africa's fighting aces."¹¹ Other media include illustrated, or entirely-pictorial, newspaper articles in publications ranging from *The Times* to *The Listener*.¹² RAF uniforms and symbols are absent from all of these depictions. However, repeated mention is made of the trainees' service and future occupations as pilots, ensuring the audience's association of RAF aviator with vigour.



Fig. 3.3. 174 Squadron personnel play cricket in Normandy, 1944.¹³

Cricket, a stereotypically British game with upper-class implications, also makes regular appearances in multiple media of aviation-related propaganda. References to the game

⁸ 'Man in a Big Hurry', 1942, *Daily Express*, p. 1.

⁹ Howard, *The First of the Few* (1942).

¹⁰ 'Test Pilots aka Test for Pilots', 31 July 1944, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1578.17).

¹¹ 'Test Pilots aka Test for Pilots', 1944, Pathé Gazette

¹² 'With the R.A.F.', 9 November 1939, *The Listener*, p. 26; 'First Stages in Flying Instruction: The Link Trainer', 2 February 1940, *The Times*, p. 12.

¹³ 'Royal Air Force: 2nd Tactical Air Force, 1943-1945', 1944, Ref. No. CL 407, Imperial War Museums Collections (© IWM (CL 407), accessed on www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

ranged from official photographs of casual cricket matches between RAF personnel, exemplified in Figure 3.3, to the announcing of daily ‘scores’ of aerial casualties during the Battle of Britain by newspaper-sellers in the fashion of ‘63 for 7’, or “37, not out”.¹⁴ One notable example is the film *Tawny Pipit* (Miles & Saunders, 1944), when the protagonist, an RAF fighter pilot and Battle of Britain veteran, likens the battle to a cricket match when describing it to an enquiring child.¹⁵ These inclusions primarily encouraged the perception of RAF aircrew as intrinsically British while alienating their German contemporaries by contrast. Simultaneously, they subtly reinforced the ideal of the British aviator as an active ‘sporting type’, in both senses of the term. Similar attributions of vigour were assigned to American aviators following their entrance to the war, with baseball frequently taking the place of cricket. The humorous confusion of the RAF onlookers at such a game in *The Way to the Stars* was referenced in Chapter One. However, the scene serves in a similar manner to the RAF’s cricketing, characterising Americans’ sporting attitudes, with great emphasis placed on the game’s energy and the physical fitness of the American airmen involved.¹⁶

British propagandists’ promotion of aviators’ physical prowess and youthful virility is most noticeable in their hiding of wounds and wounded aviators. Richard Hillary, an Australian-born fighter pilot made famous during the war through his memoir *The Last Enemy*, is a prime example.¹⁷ In 1941, Hillary was sent to the USA to encourage public support for the nation’s entry into the war. Having sustained severe facial burns when crashing his Spitfire a year earlier, Hillary was banned from making public appearances for fear the scars from his reconstructive surgery would be detrimental to the cause.¹⁸ Despite this uncertainty, Hillary’s scars did not prevent him from seducing numerous women, including Merle Oberon, star of *The Lion Has Wings* and wife of the film’s creator Alexander Korda.¹⁹ Sebastian Faulks argues, with no apparent evidence, that Hillary’s sorrow at the loss of his handsome features and his “humiliation” in Washington lead to the “light-hearted” affair as a distraction and an attempt to prove his continued attractiveness to himself.²⁰ As with many aviators, however, Hillary’s opinions died with him when he crashed on a training flight in January 1943, leaving the motives behind his affair with Oberon a mystery, relegating Faulk’s argument to mere

¹⁴ John Ramsden, ‘British Society in the Second World War’ in Philip M. Taylor (ed.), *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988) p. 23.

¹⁵ Bernard Miles & Charles Saunders, *Tawny Pipit* (Two Cities Films, 1944).

¹⁶ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

¹⁷ Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (London: Macmillan, 1942).

¹⁸ Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) p. 48.

¹⁹ Sebastian Faulks, *The Fatal Englishman: Three Short Lives* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002) p. 167.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 163, 166-167.

supposition. Regardless, the physical appearance of RAF aviators, although unimportant to some, clearly impacted on their use in propaganda.

In other cases, aviators' wounds were downplayed and treated dismissively as though only minor inconveniences in their work. Such is the case in Pathé's 1941 newsreel story 'The Spirit of the RAF'.²¹ Beginning with shots of bandaged and plastered RAF personnel exercising in a convalescent hospital, the story progresses to show nurses, orderlies and patients outside partaking in a snowball fight. Throughout the sequence, the narrator repeatedly describes the hospitalisation as a restorative process, using phrases such as "temporarily off the active list" and "it's all part of the surgical skill to get them into good trim again".²² All shots but one depict the patients engaged in physical activity, including dribbling a football, throwing snowballs and sweeping a nurse off her feet, clearly emphasising their continued vitality and downplaying the severity of their wounds.²³ *The Daily Sketch*'s front page on 29 August 1940 also downplayed the severity of aviators' wounds, featuring a photograph of an RAF pilot in hospital with a bandaged foot, smiling at the camera while making a model aeroplane.²⁴ Accompanied by the caption "he can't keep away from his job", the "badly hurt" aviator is described as "well on the way to complete recovery, as this "Daily Sketch" picture shows."²⁵ The obscuring and downplaying of aviators' wounds in each of these examples were systematic and deliberate efforts by Britain's propagandists' to ensure stories of RAF aviators' bravery did not detract from their youthfully vigorous image.

RAF aviators' physical fitness was also promoted through contrast with their German opponents. In an account of his recent combat experiences recorded and broadcast by the BBC in January 1941, Squadron Leader A.V.R. 'Sandy' Johnstone recalled a "ludicrous" and "enormously fat" German pilot who "bailed out of a Dornier" during the Battle of Britain.²⁶ "Needless to say," he continued, "everyone thought it was our old friend Goering doing another of his celebrated reconnaissance trips over this country".²⁷ This passing anecdote appears insignificantly incidental. However, all radio appearances by RAF Fighter pilots, including both sides of interviews, were scripted down to the letter and vetted by a long series of

²¹ 'The Spirit of the RAF', 16 January 1941, Pathé Gazette (accessed on www.britishpathe.com, Ref. No. 1067.13).

²² Ibid.

²³ 'The Spirit of the RAF', 1941, Pathé Gazette.

²⁴ 'He Can't Keep Away from His Job', 29 August 1940, *Daily Sketch*, p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Alexander Johnstone, 'Battle of Britain: Spitfire Pilot', 6 January 1941, in *The Home Front: British Broadcast & Actuality Recordings 1939-45* (CD41 Recordings, 2008).

²⁷ Johnstone, 'Battle of Britain', 1941, in *The Home Front* (2008).

authorities before being recorded. The process is evidenced by a file of draft scripts and press releases held by the RAF Museum Archive, donated by J.S. Ward, 11 Group's Press Liaison Officer from 1940 to 1941.²⁸ Footnotes from many of these drafts show that each script was vetted and censored by not only Ward at 11 Group, but the Press Section at FC Headquarters and AM's Press and Publicity Branch before being forwarded to the MoI for final approval.²⁹ Accordingly, every word Johnstone read off his script had been approved for public broadcast by all four parties, and his comment on the physical fitness of the German bomber pilot was a deliberate inclusion by Britain's propagandists, encouraging the audience to make comparisons between their representations of British and German aviators.

All of this deliberate emphasis on, and resulting expectations of, physical fitness encouraged the perception of RAF personnel as attractively rakish youths. Such a message matched up with many popular perceptions of aviators, as evidenced by the countless jokes made in a number of media about their sexual proclivity and attractiveness. Such media include advertisements, exemplified by Figure 1.1, and cartoons such as Joseph Lee's April 1940 parody of the RAF Operations Room, replacing enemy bomber formations with "Squadron Leader Babshot on his way to Blackpool to see Miss Baba Holdworthy."³⁰ RAF aviators' stereotyped preoccupation with sexual pursuits was similarly popular within the service, as exemplified by Figure 3.4, in which the cartoon character Pilot Officer Prune adds double-entendre to an article on navigation in the February 1944 issue of *Tee Emm*.³¹ Similar inferences are also included in numerous feature films, one being Carol Reed's 1940 drama *Girl in the News*, in which a housemaid comments on the activities of another, "Next thing we know, the army won't be good enough for her, she'll be running after the RAF".³² To this, a third maid replies "[won't] Catch me on that caper, all they can talk of is aeroplanes, the army think of other things".³³ It appears, therefore, that while youth and vigour were popular attributes of the 'brylcreem boys', many perceived Army personnel as roguish and slightly dishonourable by comparison to the RAF's rakish qualities.

²⁸ 'Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts', 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

²⁹ "'Keep the Fans Turning', A.M. No. 861', 8 June 1940, p. 2, in 'Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts', 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

³⁰ Churchman's Cigarettes, 'Churchman's No. 1', 14 December 1939, *The Times*, p. 12; Joseph Lee, 'Smiling Through: Air Force Operations', 25 April 1940, *Evening News* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No JL1968).

³¹ William Hooper, 'Prune always takes an interest in contours', February 1944, *Tee Emm*, p. 270 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, Ref. No. Misc 21/27).

³² Carol Reed, *Girl in the News* (Twentieth Century Productions, 1940).

³³ *Ibid.*



Fig. 3.4. Pilot Officer Prune “takes an interest in contours” in *Tee Emm*, February 1944.³⁴

Although *Girl in the News* implies that the RAF aviator had a less aggressive reputation than his Army and Navy counterparts, there was still a requirement for him to appear actively heterosexual as a part of the era’s ideals concerning masculinity and strength.³⁵ As argued by Frances Houghton, RAF fighter pilots’ self-perceptions changed dramatically over the course of their service. Despite their personal evolutions, aviators’ propaganda representations and public perceptions remained grounded in the masculine ideals attributed to all military personnel in mass media during the Second World War.³⁶ When writing his memoir, Squadron Leader Ian Gleed invented a fictitious girlfriend to alleviate the concerns of his publisher, Victor Gollancz, around his “confirmed bachelor status”.³⁷ In a television interview conducted in 1997, fellow pilot Christopher Gotch revealed that he and Gleed had a brief sexual relationship while they were both stationed at RAF Middle Wallop in Hampshire.³⁸ The silence surrounding homosexuality during the Second World War resulting from its illegality, coupled with Gleed’s death over Tunisia in 1943, make any argument on his sexuality impossible to conclusively prove. However, recent authors, including Stephen Bourne and Jonathan Reeve

³⁴ William Hooper, ‘Prune always takes an interest in contours’, February 1944, *Tee Emm*, p. 270 (accessed in Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London, Ref. No. Misc 21/27, supplied care of the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives).

³⁵ For further examples of these ideals’ impact on Second World War armed forces and their personnel, see Geoffrey Hayes & Kirk W. Goodlet, ‘Exploring Masculinity in the Canadian Army Officer Corps, 1939-45’, *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’études canadiennes*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Spring 2014, pp. 40-69.

³⁶ Frances Houghton, ‘Becoming ‘a Man’ During the Battle of Britain: Combat, Masculinity and Rites of Passage in the Memoirs of ‘the Few’ in Linsey Robb & Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p. 114. For examples of these ideals’ attribution to personnel of other military services, see Penny Summerfield, ‘Divisions at Sea: Class, Gender, Race, and Nation in Maritime Films of the Second World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 22, No. 3, September 2001, pp. 330-353.

³⁷ Stephen Bourne, *Fighting Proud: The Untold Story of the Gay Men Who Served in Two World Wars* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2017) p. 97.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 102.

have used the two pieces of available evidence to conclude that Gleed was gay.³⁹ Although bold, the claim is contestable on two grounds: first, it relies solely on the second-hand evidence of one person's testimony, and the inconclusive invented girlfriend. Second, in the present age when sexuality and gender identity are categorised with increasing specificity, the term 'gay' represents a very strong statement on Gleed's identity. Bourne's labelling leaves no room for the possibility that Gleed may not have identified with present definitions of the term 'gay', excluding as it does other identities such as bisexual or questioning.⁴⁰ Such a broad use of the term 'gay' would be expected of an author writing in the mid- to late-20th C. on servicemen's lives, but for an author writing in 2018 specifically on homosexuality during the two World Wars, Bourne's lack of circumspection is inexcusable. Regardless of his sexuality or any arguments over it, Gleed's creation of a fictional romantic life reflects the expectations of RAF aviators held by Britain's wartime publishers and public.

Despite its popularity, the widely-promoted image of the handsome, sexually active RAF aviator often stood at odds with reality. James Storrar, whose notes on the public's expectations of RAF pilots are quoted in this thesis's Introduction, further widened the gap between propaganda and his experiences as a pilot. Storrar declared that "I haven't talked to a girl since I was on leave last and it doesn't worry me in the slightest. All I want to do when I get time off is to go to the flicks or have a quite[sic] drink in the local pub with the rest of the boys."⁴¹ Despite their frequent association with youthful virility, Storrar's facetious cynicism evidences that many aviators clearly disliked their stereotype's popularity. It is erroneous to assume, therefore, that the youthfully active stereotype's propagandisation cannot have been the primary motivator for all those volunteering to join the RAF.

Informality

Martin Francis writes extensively on the RAF's unity through their "easygoing and irregular ethos" of lax systems of authority, excessive drinking and slang.⁴² These attributes frequently appear in propaganda depicting RAF aviators, both factual and fictional, testifying not only to the trait's recognition among the British public, but to the willingness of the AM and MoI to promote the RAF's often disruptive behaviour as a positive, even aspirational, characteristic.

³⁹ Bourne, *Fighting Proud* (2017) p. 104; Jonathon Reeve, *Battle of Britain Voices* (Stroud: Amberley, 2015) p. 225.

⁴⁰ Diane Richardson & Surya Monro, *Sexuality, Equality & Diversity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 7

⁴¹ James Storrar, Letter to Mother, 1940, Ref. No. X005-4835/002, Royal Air Force Museum Archive, p. 3.

⁴² Francis, *The Flyer* (2008) pp. 32-36.

As examined in Chapter One, depictions of RAF aviators in informal situations grew in prevalence and emphasis over the course of the Second World War, with early representations merely utilising it as evidence of the service's activity, as in 'Cavalry of the Clouds'.⁴³ By 1945, the service's reputation for informality was such that renowned lexicographer Eric Partridge, at the time a clerk at the AM, wrote *A Dictionary of RAF Slang*.⁴⁴ "Respectfully dedicated to Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert De La Ferté", the book's popularity was such that it remains in print to this day.⁴⁵ In many cases, however, propagandised depictions of the RAF's informality were heavily sanitised by comparison to reality, one example being *The Way to the Stars*. When the commander of the bomber squadron, played by Trevor Howard, complains about "These fighter types, you know. Top button undone, victory rolls... bad show, I think", he follows this passive denouncement of their disregard for authority and sensibility with "mind you, I'm not saying they're not going a good job at the moment."⁴⁶ This passing critique, implying only mild infringements, stands acutely at odds with the reality of fighter stations during the Battle of Britain, when breaches of uniform regulations often extended far beyond undone buttons to "check-shirts, suede shoes, red trousers, and pyjamas worn under flying kit."⁴⁷ Joseph Lee's cartoon 'Smiling Through: Rubber Saver' exemplifies this sanitisation's presence in the public's perception of RAF aviators. Although the depicted RAF fighter pilot wears an undone 'Mae West' to imply his relaxed approach to safety regulations, his uniform is otherwise pristine in appearance, with his jacket buttons, tie and flying boots all clean and in perfect order.⁴⁸ Further evidence of the British public's perception of RAF aviators' clothing standards exists in Chapter Two's comparison of Roald Dahl and James Storrar's experiences, both of whom based their reception by strangers on the appearances of their uniforms.⁴⁹

A similar gap between reality and propaganda exists in depictions of aviators drinking and celebrating. Once again, *The Way to the Stars* serves as an excellent example of this phenomena. With several scenes depicting the drunken antics of both RAF and American personnel, the film comes closer than any of its wartime contemporaries to depicting the

⁴³ 'Cavalry of the Clouds', 1939, Pathé Gazette.

⁴⁴ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of RAF Slang* (London: Michael Joseph, 1945).

⁴⁵ Partridge, *A Dictionary of RAF Slang* (2016).

⁴⁶ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

⁴⁷ Francis, *The Flyer* (2008) p. 22

⁴⁸ Joseph Lee, 'Smiling Through: Rubber Saver', 6 October 1942, *Evening News* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. JL2209).

⁴⁹ Dahl, *Going Solo* (1986) p. 207; James Storrar, Letter to Mother, 1940, Ref. No. X005-4835/002, Royal Air Force Museum Archive, p. 2.

relationship between real aviators and alcohol.⁵⁰ This relative accuracy presumably comes from the film's author, Terrence Rattigan, who experienced first-hand the stresses and outlets of aircrews during his service as an AG in CC during the war's early stages.⁵¹ However, while the scenes of raucous singing and dancing around a hotel bar using ornaments as imitation instruments appear realistic, they pale in comparison to the "parties which lasted until dawn" frequently described in station histories and personal biographies alike.⁵² A small number of films made in the war's final years make less direct references to the RAF's boisterous habits. One example is included in Powell and Pressburger's *I Know Where I'm Going*, when Pamela Brown's character Catriona MacLaine apologises to her guests for her house being "knocked about a bit", explaining that she had "only just got rid of the boys".⁵³ When questioned further, she explains "the boys", were "the RAF, of course", but "they've been very fair" concerning compensation.⁵⁴

While implying their boisterousness, neither *The Way to the Stars* or *I Know Where I'm Going* depict aviators' drinking habits as an impediment on their flying abilities, something admitted by many real RAF personnel. New Zealand pilot James Sanders, when posted to a navigator training unit near Blackpool, recalled a "runner would be dispatched to winkle us out of the bars" for nocturnal training flights over the Irish Sea, hastily-scheduled owing to changeable weather conditions.⁵⁵ "On at least two occasions" Sanders flew drunk, with his "two navigation pupils and my WOP-AG fearfully, if not soberly, watching my every smallest move."⁵⁶ Numerous further examples of the service's drinking habits are detailed by Martin Francis in his work *The Flyer*, with Francis concluding that the practice was "ubiquitous in the RAF", and "few RAF diaries or memoirs do not contain some reference to the consumption of liquor".⁵⁷ As revealed in Chapter One, the portrayal of RAF aviators' informality was only gradually introduced to feature film propaganda. By the war's end, a limited number including *The Way to the Stars* had referenced their reputation for rowdy celebrations. Throughout this process, however, aviators' habitual drinking was always portrayed as a positive humanising trait, never as detrimental to their occupational proficiency, as described by real aviators.

⁵⁰ Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945).

⁵¹ Aldgate & Richards, *Britain Can Take It* (1994) p. 277

⁵² Asquith, *The Way to the Stars* (1945); Wallace, *RAF Biggin Hill* (1969) p. 165.

⁵³ Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, *I Know Where I'm Going* (The Archers, 1944).

⁵⁴ Powell & Pressburger, *I Know Where I'm Going* (1944).

⁵⁵ Sanders, *Of Wind and Water* (1990) p. 92.

⁵⁶ Ibid p. 92.

⁵⁷ Francis, *The Flyer* (2008) p. 35

These depictions promoting informality are reinforced in many visual examples through body language and posture. The most common of these, found in innumerable propaganda and non-propaganda representations, is the RAF character's appearance with one of his hands in his hip pocket, exemplified in Figures 1.7, 2.1, 2.3, 2.13, 2.25 and 3.5. Alternative occupations for an aviator's hand include clutching either a cigarette or a pipe, as in Figures 1.1, 2.1, and 2.10. Drinks also make appearances, with alcohol, as seen in Figure 2.13, sometimes included as a nod to the RAF's reputation for drunken exuberance. Alternatively, tea is included as a characteristically British drink when sharing the stage with aviators of other nationalities, as in *The Way to the Stars* in Figures 1.9 and 2.13. In many of these cases, the aviators are leaning against an object, such as a pub bar in Neibour's cartoon "They borrowed him from Mars...", an aircraft wing in Figure 1.1, or a mantelpiece in Figure 3.5. Cartoonists often displayed characters leaning in a similar manner when emphasising calmness or disregard for authority, as is the case in Carl Giles' 1943 work "Do You Mind Repeating That Remark About the Working Classes Being Incapable of Thinking for Themselves?", Figure 3.6.



Fig. 3.5. "It's all very confusing. He says from 10,000 feet Uncle Willie looks like an Aunt!" Joseph Lee mocks RAF pilots' casual storytelling and the British public's quaint misunderstanding, July 1942.⁵⁸



Fig. 3.6. Giles depicts three brutish yet relaxed working-class men leaning against a pub bar.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Joseph Lee, 'Smiling Through: Point of View', 14 July 1942, *Evening News* (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. JL2137).

⁵⁹ Carl Giles, "Do You Mind Repeating That Remark About the Working Classes Being Incapable of Thinking for Themselves?" in S. Evelyn Thomas (ed.), *Laughs on the Home Front* (London: P.J. Press, 1943) p. 20 (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. CG/1/4/2/1/73/7/9, © Co-operative press Ltd).

Propagandised Army and Navy personnel exhibited these relaxed traits much less frequently than their RAF contemporaries, and the Army's strict regulations against soldiers resting their hands in uniform pockets were emphasised in *The Way Ahead*.⁶⁰ Accordingly, officers of the longer-established services appeared more upright and traditional in both factual and fictional propaganda depictions when compared to their RAF counterparts. One example is exhibited in David Niven's depictions of Wing Commander Crisp in *The First of the Few* and Lieutenant Perry in *The Way Ahead*.⁶¹ In the scenes where his characters were first shown interacting with their subordinates, Niven adopted a strikingly different posture. As exhibited in Figure 3.7, Crisp smiles with pocketed hands as he chats with the Spitfire pilots under his command, whereas Perry stands stiffly to attention eying his recruits with cold scorn. While RAF aviators' blatant disregard for authority was often downplayed by Britain's propagandists, these characteristics, in their diluted form, came to define both real and propagandised RAF personnel. These attributes increased saw increasing use over time, and by the war's final years, propagandised aviators rarely adhered to regulations strictly policed by Britain's other two services.

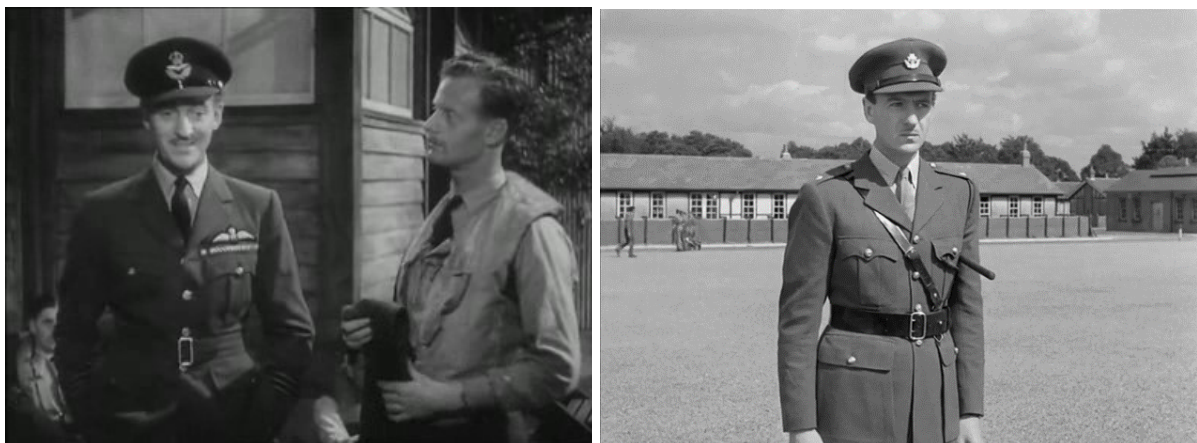


Fig. 3.7 David Niven in *The First of the Few* and *The Way Ahead*.⁶²

In many cases, the RAF's informality was emphasised, like their physical fitness, through comparisons to their *Luftwaffe* opponents. Michael Powell, Brian Desmond Hurst and Adrian Brunel utilised it to reinforce a central point of *The Lion Has Wings*, compelling their audience to compare the briefing environments of RAF and *Luftwaffe* bomber squadrons, seen in Figures 3.8.⁶³ By contrasting the relaxed, often jocular style of the RAF to the stiff, authoritarian manner of their German counterparts, the film uses the aircrews as ambassadors

⁶⁰ Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944).

⁶¹ Howard, *The First of the Few* (1942); Reed, *The Way Ahead* (1944).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

for their nations, using the brief scenes as exemplars of each side's leadership, ethos and aims. Although not as casual as Niven's performance in *The First of the Few*, the RAF aviators' informality in *The Lion Has Wings* was not merely included as an unspoken character trait but emphasised through direct contrast whilst bluntly communicated to the audience through E.V.H. Emmet's narration.



Fig. 3.8. “A striking contrast”, British and German bomber crews being briefed in *The Lion Has Wings*.⁶⁴

Appearances of RAF aircrew in BBC radio broadcasts also promoted their casual approaches to their exciting lifestyles. Programmes featuring aviators came in a variety of forms, including: accounts given by reporters in the field, studio interviews, studio dramatisations of events, monologue-style accounts given by aviators, and reports read by BBC presenters. Excepting the field reporting, all formats were scripted and subject to prior AM and MoI alteration and censorship. Broadcasted accounts often featured famous aces such as Edgar ‘Cobber’ Kain and Robert Stanford Tuck recounting their experiences of combat, injury, and explaining in vivid detail the dangers they faced every day in passive, almost dismissive tones.⁶⁵ When recalling a dogfight with Italian aircraft over the English Channel, an anonymous RAF fighter pilot described the enemy aviators as “amateurish in their reaction”, but stated that it seemed “such a shame to shoot down such pretty little machines”.⁶⁶ Despite receiving a bullet wound to the leg, Flight Lieutenant J.W.C. Simpson described his experience of parachuting

⁶⁴ Powell, Hurst & Brunel, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939).

⁶⁵ Edgar Kain, ‘Hurricane Ace: ‘Cobber’ Kain’, 7 March 1940, in *Dunkirk and the Battle of France and Flanders 1939-1940: Archive British Radio Recordings* (CD41 Recordings, 2007); Robert Stanford Tuck, ‘Experiences of a Fighter Pilot: Robert Stanford Tuck’, 15 May 1941, in *The Battle of Britain: Archive British Radio Recordings 1940, Vol. 1* (CD41 Recordings, 2007).

⁶⁶ ‘Dogfight with Italian Biplanes’, 6 December 1940, in *The Battle of Britain: Archive British Radio Recordings 1940, Vol. 1* (CD41 Recordings, 2007).

from his badly damaged aircraft as “really one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life”.⁶⁷ Simpson recalled lighting a cigarette during his descent “without any difficulty” before landing “in a cucumber frame” in a Worthing garden, with no further mention being made of his wound.⁶⁸

Adding to their carefree attitude, aviators often joked their way through broadcasts describing dangerous situations. Recalling being attacked by a German night fighter while returning from a raid on Mulheim, Australian bomber pilot Francis Mathers of 72 Squadron described with suppressed laughter how tracer bullets that were “ripping through the aircraft” knocked an object from the hand of a crewmember in the process of jettisoning it, “through the hatch, and saved him the trouble of throwing it out.”⁶⁹ A similarly passive recollection of danger was delivered by Richard Hillary, author of *The Last Enemy*, when discussing his experience of being shot down and severely burned.⁷⁰ Hillary casually recalled his reflections on mortality, the flesh peeling from his face and hands, and deflating his ‘Mae West’ in a failed attempt to commit suicide by drowning to avoid a slow, delirious death from thirst and exposure.⁷¹ Alongside their reactions to danger, RAF aviators’ relaxed leadership styles were also exhibited in many broadcasts. G.M. Chesher, a CC pilot recalling his experiences in a lifeboat with his crew, described how the “wireless operator was made captain of the dinghy” due to his overwhelming seasickness, and decisions were made democratically during their time afloat.⁷²

Each of the aforementioned aviators, perhaps due to their reading from scripts created by people they had never met, told their story in tones devoid of fear or excitement. Their emotionlessly-relaxed attitude was satirised by cartoonist Carl Giles in a series of cartoons entitled ‘As They Say –’ depicting a variety of recognisable figures or sayings from Britain’s ‘home front’ in the Second World War’s early years.⁷³ In his depiction of an aviator mid-broadcast, Figure 3.9, Giles gives a face to the invisible and anonymous RAF fighter pilot, presenting him as a young man recounting exciting events from a script with an almost

⁶⁷ John Simpson, ‘Bailing out over Worthing: J.W.C. Simpson’, 6 September 1940, in *The Battle of Britain: Archive British Radio Recordings 1940, Vol. 1* (CD41 Recordings, 2007).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Francis Mathers, ‘Experiences on the way Back from German Raid’, 30 June 1943, Ref. No. 2174, Imperial War Museums Collections.

⁷⁰ Richard Hillary, ‘Fighter Pilot Shot Down’, 14 July 1941, BBC Archive.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² G.M. Chesher in ‘Air-Sea Rescue Crew Rescued’, 11 October 1944, Ref. No. B2462/1, British Library.

⁷³ Ibid.

dispassionately calm, “so I gave him a couple of short bursts —”.⁷⁴ His physical features, including his long jaw and large moustache, imply his aristocratic background and accordingly inflect an accent on his words. Furthermore, the pilot’s action of reading aloud from sheets of paper reveals that the RAF, AM and MoI’s scripting of these broadcasts was far from secret. However, Giles’s characterisation also evidences a successful communication of the two emphasised characteristics, class and informality, to at least one audience member.

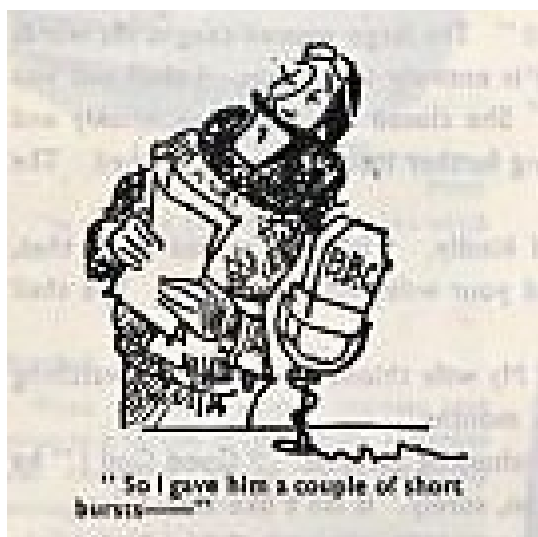


Fig. 3.9. Giles’s impression of an RAF aviator mid-broadcast, November 1941.⁷⁵

Unlike the artistic dramatisations such as Cecil McGovern’s ‘Bombers over Germany’ and ‘Battle of Britain’, scripts for aircrews’ radio interviews and accounts of actions were produced by their respective Groups’ Press Liaison Officers, such as J.S. Ward of 11 Group, FC, previously mentioned in this Chapter.⁷⁶ The majority of Ward’s collection of scripts and press releases held by the RAF Museum Archive were approved by all four vetting authorities. However, one press release, produced by Ward’s subordinate Flying Officer U.A. Titley was, as revealed by Ward in a margin annotation, “canned by H.Q.F.C.” despite being, in his opinion, “all perfectly fine”.⁷⁷ The release describes how Pilot Officer Radomski, a Polish pilot from 306 Squadron, returned “from France, after having a hand shot off by cannon shell.” The typed release is littered with handwritten inserts and crossed-out lines. The cut passages include particularly gruesome extracts such as the previous quotation and the sentences “He also saw on the floor of his cockpit a hand. As he straightened out and his head cleared, further, he found

⁷⁴ Carl Giles, ““So I gave him a couple of short bursts——”” in S. Evelyn Thomas (ed.), *Humours of ARP* (London: George G. Harrap, 1941) p. 31 (accessed on British Cartoon Archive, Ref. No. CG/1/4/2/1/73/5/21).

⁷⁵ Ibid, (© Co-operative press Ltd.).

⁷⁶ Cecil McGovern, ‘Bombers over Germany’, 15 August 1940, Ref. No. 9CL0006043, British Library; Cecil McGovern, ‘Battle of Britain: A Radio Dramatisation’, 8 May 1941, BBC Home Service (accessed on www.bbc.co.uk/archive).

⁷⁷ J.S. Ward in U.A. Titley, ‘Pilot is P/O Radomski, 306 Sqdn’, 12 September 1941, p. 1, in ‘Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts’, 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

that the strange hand was his own.”⁷⁸ Although the AM emphasised aviators’ exciting lifestyle to highlight their casual manner, from the censoring of these dramatic passages there were clearly limits to which they adhered, with a demarcation between exciting and gruesome.

Conclusions

The two characteristics attributed to RAF aviators examined in this chapter, vigour and informality, overlap in many instances. Where relaxation complemented energy, aspects such as aviators’ sexual attractiveness and youthful hedonism often incorporated aspects from both characteristics. However, one characteristic was never emphasised to the point of negatively impacting on the other. For example, aviators were never depicted as apathetic and unhealthy owing to a relaxed approach to exercise, or brash and excitable due to their active and aggressive personalities. These constrictions conform closely with the ideas of decency stereotypically associated with the upper classes, and contrast sharply with the uncouth manners of the stereotyped lower classes, as satirised by Giles. Similarly, aviators’ tone when broadcasting scripted accounts of their exploits was delicately balanced, being modestly diffident about their actions, but not glib or irreverent about the war they waged. Accordingly, although the two principal attributes were consistently connected to RAF aviators by Britain’s propagandists, moderating their use and ensuring their complimentary combination were equally important aspects in characterisation. Additionally, the association between these characteristics and RAF aviators was largely dependent upon their contrasting with the attributes of other services. Both informality and youthful vigour feature in propaganda depictions throughout the war. However, they were often diminished, or even inverted, when a demographic with an even stronger reputation for rapacious behaviour, such as the USAAF aviators in *The Way to the Stars*, appeared alongside the aviators. In these cases, as revealed in Chapter One, British aviators were depicted as formal and reserved, as a foil to the other characters’ hedonism. Accordingly, youthful vitality and informality were emphasised in propaganda depictions of RAF aviators only when and as far as useful.

⁷⁸ U.A. Titley, ‘Pilot is P/O Radomski, 306 Sqdn’, 12 September 1941, p. 1, in ‘Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts’, 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

Conclusion

The RAF aviator's propaganda image evolved throughout the war's duration. Initially bearing strong similarities their First World War and interbellum predecessors, aviators' propaganda representations became increasingly diverse and human. These depictions simultaneously contributed to the MoI's 'people's war' message, raised awareness of the war's international nature, and trumpeted the RAF's uniquely offensive role in it. By the war's end, however, RAF aviators had disappeared from white propaganda, appearing only through representations of their actions or in fiction. Despite these changes, uniforms, flying equipment and insignia were consistently used as symbols to promote specific characteristics across multiple media, often purposefully emphasised by propagandists and consequently affecting the British public's perception of RAF aviators. Thanks to their repeated use, these symbols remained recognisable emblems of the service and its personnel, and the characteristics they alluded to retained their popularity with public and propagandists alike. Even where symbols and messages changed, such as the introduction of the War Service Dress and the promotion of the RAF's diverse composition, the aviators themselves remained energetic, informal and youthful. These characteristics often varied during the war, with emphases on aviators' informality and youthfulness increasing in intensity over time. However, the attributes were never completely replaced, and remained a constant feature of RAF aviators' propaganda image throughout the conflict. Furthermore, these symbols and characteristics are identifiable across multiple propaganda media. Radio programmes, literature, and both stationary and moving images all exhibit references to these symbols and characteristics, with Britain's propagandists often creating and editing material to ensure their inclusion and promotion.

Equally, any material that might risk depicting aviators in a light that did not conform to these traits was either highly selective in its content, exemplified by the Pathé newsreel story 'The Spirit of the RAF', or censored entirely, as was U.S. Titley's broadcast script on Flying Officer Radomski.¹ Based on Ward's collection of scripts and press releases, it is clear that both the AM's and FC's publicity departments exercised considerable control over RAF fighter pilots' propaganda image.² In many cases, as with the removal of specific details concerning people, aircraft and locations from press releases, the changes made by FC's Press and

¹ 'The Spirit of the RAF', 1941, Pathé Gazette; U.A. Titley, 'Pilot is P/O Radomski, 306 Sqdn', 12 September 1941, p. 1, within 'Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts', 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

² 'Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts', 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

Publicity Section were clearly censorship of information that was considered valuable to the enemy, not character-shaping. However, material portraying aviators as wounded, weak, or any other undesirable attributes, was repeatedly removed from both Ward's scripts and the newsreel footage FC supplied to newsreel producers. It is therefore clear that FC maintained a tight grip on their aviators' public image, ensuring its conformity to the characteristics examined in Chapter Three.

Although Ward's material is limited in scope by his position within FC's 11 group, BC presumably wielded a similar power over the propaganda representations of its own personnel. BC's contribution to propaganda is evidenced in correspondence between Commander in Chief Arthur Harris and Minister of Information Brendan Bracken, held by the RAF Museum Archive. Bracken's letters, while few in number, reveal Harris's involvement in BC's propaganda appearances, including responses to Harris's offer of aviators for radio appearances and an intelligence report on "News and Enemy Propaganda" with a section on "German arguments against bombing Berlin" that "may amuse you" highlighted by "B.B."³ Based on this and Simon MacKenzie's claims concerning Harris's publicity agenda, the dramatic changes in bomber crews' propaganda appearances examined in Chapter One are attributable to BC, and not the MoI.⁴ However, the Bracken's persistent correspondence with Harris on his contributions to both domestic and foreign propaganda demonstrates the MoI's investment in the process.⁵ Additionally, Harris's correspondence collection reveals the MoI and BC's differing priorities. One of Bracken's letters apologising for a Movietone film on bomb damage, although "admirable... for informational purposes," being confined to "our mobile units" due to the differing expectations of "people who have paid for their entertainment in cinemas".⁶ Accordingly, although FC and BC shaped the RAF aviator's propaganda image with the aid of MoI Mass Observation and Home Intelligence Reports, the MoI controlled the materials' release and had the power of veto over the two Commands' proposals.

As this thesis has demonstrated, British propaganda consistently attributed a specific set of characteristics to RAF aviators across its many media. Additionally, as means of identifying the otherwise anonymous aviators, Britain's propagandists repeatedly included and emphasised components of the RAF's uniform in their material. Owing to the aviators'

³ Brendan Bracken, Letter to Arthur Harris, 3 February 1943, Ref. No. H 87/18, Royal Air Force Museum Archive; Brendan Bracken in 'Outline of News and Enemy Propaganda', 11 August 1943, Ref. No. H 87/24C, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

⁴ MacKenzie, 'On Target', 1997, pp. 58-59.

⁵ Welch, *Persuading the People* (2016) p. 15.

⁶ Brendan Bracken, Letter to Arthur Harris, 23 June 1943, Ref. No. H 87/21, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

anonymity, their role as link between the symbols and characteristics was therefore largely unnecessary. For, if the propagandised aviators were defined purely by their visual identifiers and attributed characteristics, then the value of the propaganda aviator as an abstract propaganda component was negligible. The value of these symbols and characteristics in the propagandisation of RAF aviators, therefore, was inestimable. While coming to these conclusions, this thesis also raises further questions around RAF aviators' depiction in propaganda. Although Chapter One overviewed the changes undergone by British aviators' propaganda image throughout the war's duration, further research is required on the chronological patterns of the specific details of this image, including the changing use of symbols and characteristics. Other paths of possible future research include comparing propaganda representations of racially, ethnically, nationally and regionally differing aviators. Similarly, did aviators' propaganda image and use change based on the target audience, distribution location, or medium? Alternatively, research could be directed towards the propaganda's continued impact on British society. The RAF's Second World War activities continue to provide a source of national pride in the United Kingdom, as exemplified by the events of 2018's 'RAF100' centenary celebrations. It should then be asked: how closely do these present perceptions of Second World War RAF aviators correlate to the propaganda representations of the 1940s, and is there a causal link?

A final avenue of future research is the question of causality. Throughout this thesis, RAF aviators' presence has been analysed in the spheres of propaganda, public opinion and, reality, with each compared to the other and their similarities highlighted. However, few claims on these similarities' causes have been made, and questions surrounding the origins of ideas, messages and symbols associated with RAF aviators in the propaganda material have been left deliberately unanswered. In some areas, letters and Mass Observation reports enabled these connections' extension between propaganda and another of the two spheres. In others, as in the case of promoting the RAF's diversity, evidence such as radio broadcast scripts made it possible to trace the cause of a message's deliberate inclusion to the propagandists themselves. However, in none of these cases was it possible to identify the cause of the ideas themselves, due to both scant evidence of causality and the vagueness of the idea itself. Within the scope of this thesis, it was not possible to answer such questions of causality and origin without significantly overextending its length restriction, and the author has instead resorted to simply identifying patterns and recurrences identifiable within the extensive propaganda material. In doing so, it is hoped that future researchers endeavour to identify the specific causes of these

patterns. Despite these propagandised ideas' uncertain origins, however, Britain's propagandists went to great lengths to promote them. By applying the theoretical model of the reciprocal influences of reality, propaganda and public opinion, the AM and MoI's promotion of these ideas undoubtedly aided their popularity in British public opinion. These popular ideas can, in turn, be attributed to the personality-cult-esque adoration of RAF aviators in Britain both during and after the Second World War.

Britain's reverential sentimentality towards Second World War RAF aviators continues to this day, with their use as symbols of national pride surging during 2018's celebration of the service's centenary anniversary. Examples include multiple television and cinematic appearances painting FC command pilots as the nation's saviours. Nigel Farage's 1 April 2018 Tweet posted for RAF100 numbers among these examples, featuring Farage briefly conversing with an anonymous Battle of Britain veteran.⁷ Farage's political motivations for posting his "tribute to the Royal Air Force" evoked a wide range of responses, including many comments attacking Farage's 'Brexit' ideologies by recalling the numerous "refugee" pilots from Continental Europe who served in the RAF during the conflict.⁸ The gap between these patriotically-sentimental narratives and the reality of aerial warfare makes their persistent popularity especially troubling. This gap is often identifiable in many of the examples analysed in this thesis, including American-born pilot James Davies' interview script, referenced in Chapter One.⁹ Written only 12 days before Davies' death, the script is made especially poignant by the 27-year-old's closing remark: "I haven't got a wife – yet. But I'm hoping to be married one day in June – very, very, soon, in fact."¹⁰ It is easy to be swept away by romance of RAF aviators' propaganda representations. Davies' script numbers among many sources that, with a modicum of further research, strip away the romantic propaganda narratives examined in this thesis, revealing the harsh realities of war.

⁷ Nigel Farage, 'My tribute to the Royal Air Force at #RAF100', 9 September 2018 (accessed on https://twitter.com/nigel_farage/status/980175102456279041?lang=en 8 February 2018).

⁸ Matt Sacca, Response to Nigel Farage, 'My tribute to the Royal Air Force at #RAF100', 1 April 2018 (accessed on <https://twitter.com/SpartabusSacca/status/980387468766662656> 20 February 2018); Ian Irons, Response to Nigel Farage, 'My tribute to the Royal Air Force at #RAF100', April 2018 (accessed on <https://twitter.com/IanIrons/status/980496581567897601> 20 February 2018).

⁹ 'Suggested Broadcast Script by F/Lt J.W.S. Davies, of 79 Squadron, American-Born Fighter Pilot', 15 June 1940, p. 5 in 'Ward (Pt. 2): Press Releases, and Interview Scripts', 1940-1941, Ref. No. X008-4359, Royal Air Force Museum Archive.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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