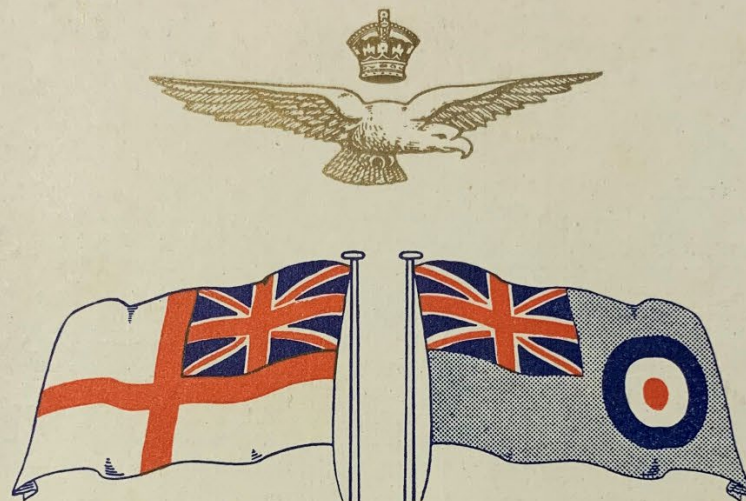


1914-1918



**No. 14 SQUADRON
ROYAL NAVAL AIR SERVICE**

AND

**No. 214 SQUADRON
ROYAL AIR FORCE
ASSOCIATION**

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Official No.



A SHORT HISTORY
OF
No. 14 SQUADRON
ROYAL NAVAL AIR SERVICE
AND
No. 214 SQUADRON
ROYAL AIR FORCE

★

1914 - 1918

SECOND DOUBLE RAID IN ONE NIGHT

14½ TONS OF BOMBS DROPPED IN ONE NIGHT BY No. 214 SQUADRON.

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY DEEP APPRECIATION
OF THE SPLENDID WAY IN WHICH ALL RANKS WORKED YESTERDAY IN
ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE ABOVE RECORD FOR THE SQUADRON.

I FEEL SURE THAT THE OPERATIONS OF THE
ENEMY MUST HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY HAMPERED BY OUR CONTINUOUS
BOMBARDMENT, THEREBY HELPING OUR ALLIES TO GAIN THEIR
OBJECTIVES IN THE GREAT ADVANCE.

No. 214 SQUADRON, R.A.F.,
30th September, 1918.

H. G. BRACKLEY,
Major,
Officer Commanding.

No. 214 SQUADRON, R.A.F.

RAID ORDERS.

15th AUGUST, 1918.

Machine.	Letter.	Pilot.	Observer.	Gunner.	Load.
Caproni. B.5.		Ens. Taber.	Ens. Fahy.	El. Hale	1-550 & 2-250
9674	C	Lieut. Lewtas	Cpl. Obs. Conlev	El. Kennedy	1-1660lb.
3492	O	Lieut. Hetherington	2/Lt. Fletcher	„ Sistare	15-112lb.
4578	D	Lieut. Fraser.	Cpl. Obs. Barber	El. Desgranges	16-112lb.
4579	H	Capt. Russell	Sgt. Wardrop	Pt. Curtiss	16-112lb.
4581	F	Lieut. Nichol	Lieut. Bowen	El. Carpenter	16-112lb.
5411	M	Capt. Studd	Lieut. Clark, H.E.	2/Lt. Whittaker	1-1660lb.
4570	K	Lieut. McIlraith	Corpl Baker	2/Lt. Belton	1-1660lb. 2-16lb.
9643	B	Lieut. Ellison	Sgt. Plt. Dell	Lt. Mansell	1-1660lb. 2-16lb.

EMERGENCY RAID ORDERS.

IN CASE OF THE WEATHER BEING TOO BAD FOR BIG BOMBS.

Machine.	Letter.	Pilot.	Observer.	Gunner.	Load.
4578		Lieut. Fraser	Cpl. Obs. Barber	2/Lt. Price	16-112lb.
3492		Lieut. Hetherington	2/Lt. Fletcher	El. Wright	16-112lb.
4581		Lieut. Nichol	Lieut. Bowen	El. Murray	15-112lb.

GROUND OFFICERS:—Captain C. T. Tyrer.
Lieut. A. R. Clark.

R.N.A.S. "TAILS WELL UP"

We're flying by day, and we're flying by night,
We've harried the Hun, and have put him to flight.
Oh, I tell you Life's great to R.N.A.S. fellers,
Who, I hear it is said, are the Air Cinderellas!
In the grey of the dawn, in the black of the night,
'Planes heavy with bombs, till at length they are light;
For the trails left behind us, are always the tellers,
When the stunting is done by the Air Cinderellas.

The Squadron's Formation and Early History.

The history of No. 14 Squadron, R.N.A.S., and No. 214 Squadron R.A.F. is very largely a history of bold pioneer work which contributed to wide-spread effects on mankind in later years.

One effect, tragically, was the development of intensified night bombing. The other, more happily, was the ever-improving establishment of commercial air lines. For the knowledge gained by the pioneers of the heavy night-flying aircraft helped materially in the building of the day and night air passenger services.

And this was finely exemplified in the work of the squadron's outstanding commander, later Air Commodore H. G. Brackley, who, as Air Superintendent of Imperial Airways from 1924 to 1939, and later as a high executive of B.O.A.C. and B.S.A.A., did magnificent work in creating the British world network of air services today.

Whilst the actual life and work of the Squadron is still vividly in the minds of those who served with it, to give an accurate account of its origins has not been too easy. The first World War, with the series of events of world importance since, now seems a long way away, and it is chiefly through the willing and valuable help of its former members that it has been possible to give a fairly reliable account, which, unfortunately, may be wrong in some details.

No. 14 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service, later 214 Squadron, Royal Air Force, was formed at Couderque near Dunkerque, France, in August, 1917, from No. 7 Squadron and was first known as No. 7a Squadron. It was equipped with the Handley-Page twin engine machine, carrying 16/112 lb. bombs, armed with four Lewis machine guns, and manned with Pilot, Navigator, front and rear Gunlayers. Its personnel being drawn from No. 7 Squadron and No. 4 Wing, many of whom had already seen service in the Royal Naval Division and the Armoured Cars Division, in France, Egypt and the Dardanelles. Commanded by Lieut. Commander H. G. Brackley, it soon assumed the initiative and developed those magnificent fighting qualities for which it is since renowned.

The earlier history of these Squadrons is of considerable interest, as No. 7 Squadron was formed in November, 1916, at Petit-Synthe, Dunkerque, and first equipped with Short Bombers and with Handley-Pages in February, 1917, which revolutionised night bombing with disastrous results to German operations.

This Squadron had its origin in No. 4 Wing, Royal Naval Air Service, which was formed as No. 4 Squadron at Dover in March, 1915, under the command of Lieut. Commander C. Courtney, R.N., who later became Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Courtney. In August of that year it was transferred to Eastchurch where Flight Sub Lieut. Brackley joined it. About the same time Warrant Officer Jack Alcock was posted to its strength. Jack, as he was popularly known, later became Sir John Alcock, when in 1919 with Sir A. Whitten-Brown they made the first Atlantic crossing by air from Nova Scotia to Ireland.

Eastchurch is one of the most historic sites in the history of flying in this country. Not only was it, in effect, the birthplace of the Royal Naval Air Service, but it was one of the first aerodromes in Britain where flying was undertaken methodically and seriously.

As far back as February, 1911, Mr. Francis McClean (now Sir Francis) offered to lend aircraft to the Admiralty to instruct Naval officers in Flying. One of the first four to be chosen for the course was Lieut. C. R. Samson, who later became the famous Commander Samson.

The first time the Squadron was in "action" was the occasion on which the powder factory at Faversham blew up with heavy loss of life. The hangar doors at Eastchurch, though about 7 miles away, were blown in, and men from the Squadron, and the Naval Flying School, went to the scene, in all available transport, to help.

In May, 1916, No. 4 Squadron was again moved, this time to France, the personnel travelling by road to Dover, crossing by destroyer to Dunkerque. It was re-established at Petit-Synthe, where it was equipped with Caudrons, Breguets, Nieuports, Sopwiths, Shorts, Camels. These machines were then formed into a number of Squadrons, Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and in September No. 4 Squadron became No. 4 Wing, under the command of Captain Charles Lamb, later Air Marshal Sir Charles Lamb. In April, 1918, upon merging into the Royal Air Force, it became No. 5 Group.

Squadron-Commander Brackley continued in command right to the end of the war. For this the Squadron was most fortunate, for Squadron-Commander Brackley was an ideal commander with born leadership, great personal courage, much initiative, and a warm human understanding.

The first Handley-Pages, with which the Squadron's work is most closely associated, began to arrive about the early spring of 1917, some of them being flown up from the Nancy area, in Eastern France, where they had been training pilots and navigators.

Such appear to be the main dates in the development of No. 14 Squadron, from the original unit founded at Dover.

These dates are only practical facts lying behind a remarkable record of hard and efficient effort, backed by notable teamwork, to which every member of the Squadron contributed a valuable share.

Continuously, from the formation of No. 14 at the end of 1917, till the very last night before the Armistice, the Handley-Pages went off on their raids over Belgium.

Though based on land they were essentially a Naval Unit, attached to, and operating with the Dover Patrol under the command of Admiral Lord Keyes. Their objectives were very largely targets—at Bruges Docks, Ostende,



AIR COMMODORE H. G. BRACKLEY, D.S.O., M.C.



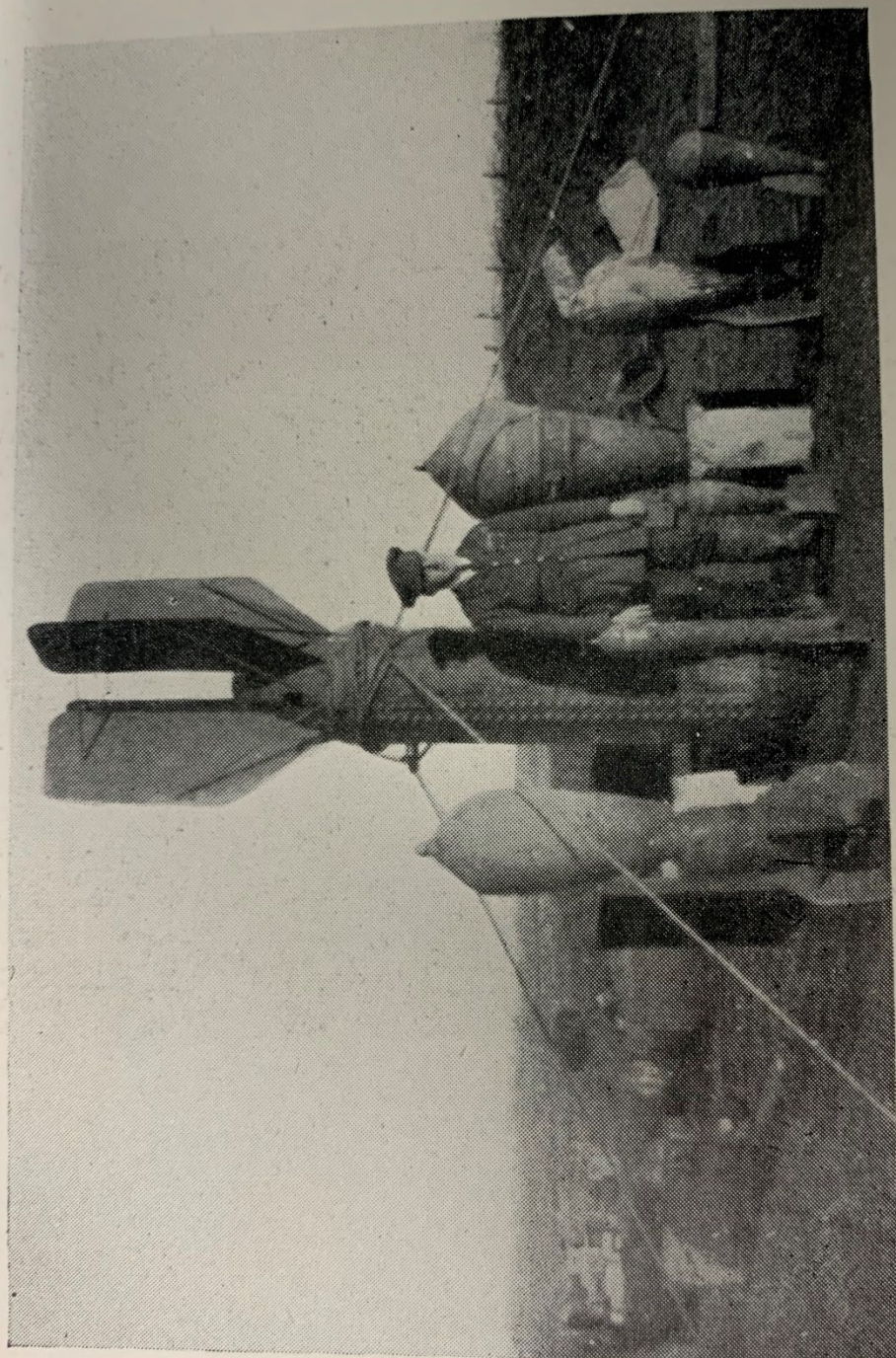
FAIRWAY TO OSTEND HARBOUR.



BILLET AT CAMPHIN.



BOB BARBER HOLDS UP BILL BAKER.



BOMBS.
THE 1,660, 500, 250, 112, 28 LB. AND PARACHUTE FLARE.



MESS SECRETARY 1918.
STILL IN IT 1952.



'BILL' & SELBY,

and Zeebrugge Mole—whose damage would interfere with the German submarine activity from the Belgian Coast.

The life and traditions of the Squadron were entirely naval in character.

The Handley-Pages with which they flew were machines far in advance of their time. Their performance and weight-carrying capacity right back in 1916 compared very well with those of the bombers in the R.A.F. at the beginning of the 1939 war, twenty three years later.

Ordinary young men, who had joined up from civilian life, were put into these huge machines, which seemed incredible monsters in those days. They learnt to manage them, and flew them night after night over the lines against very heavy opposition.

Such was the efficiency of the crews, and such the efficiency of the machines, that for months raids were carried out against intense concentrations of searchlights and anti-aircraft fire, almost as if by clockwork without, fortunately, many casualties.

This effort was made possible by the efficiency of the ground crews, and everybody in the Squadron, who took an equal pride in seeing work well done.

A searchlight holds me in its cruel grip
And lights with blinding glare my little ship . . .
A thousand eyes must watch me in the town:
A thousand souls must wish to bring me down,
As I plunge onward through the flaming hell
Of blinding brightness and of bursting shell . . .
They do not picture me crouched in my seat
Dreading to watch the shells, and on my feet
Gazing with frightened eyes, biting my lip.
He can pity while he strikes:
 Death, Grief, and Pain
 Are what I give.
 O that the slain
 Might live—might live?
I know them not, for I have blindly killed.
And nameless hearts with nameless sorrow filled.

INTO ACTION

The Squadron lost no time in getting down to its job, and one of its first outstanding actions was when a machine on patrol sighted a flotilla of destroyers off the coast of Belgium, proceeding in the direction of Zeebrugge Mole. A straddle of 112 lb. bombs was dropped and a direct hit was observed amidships on the last destroyer, which was later reported to be badly damaged and sinking rapidly. Every night when weather permitted, raids were made on Ostend, Zeebrugge, Bruges and military targets behind the lines. In August it carried out the first two raids in one night; machines on returning loaded another 16/112 lb. bombs, each machine being therefore

responsible for dropping over $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons of bombs. In September the 250 lb. bomb came into action; it was used mainly on the Zeebrugge Canal lock gates, the machinery sustaining severe damage and preventing the activities of German submarines which were harassing the food supplies of the country by their constant attacks on merchant shipping. Night after night the submarine base at Bruges was attacked in spite of its heavy defences. Machines would glide in with their engines shut off and release their loads of destruction.

In February 1918 the Admiralty decided that the Squadron should have a well-earned rest and it was transferred to Alquines, near St. Omer, but not for long, for its work in operations with the Dover Patrol were of such importance that within two weeks it was back at Caudekerque Branch and again attacking its old objectives.

Now came the German break through on the Somme and an urgent call from the Army for the bombing of German supply lines, and night after night machines were raiding, both for the Navy and Army, for the Squadron was now the only heavy bombing squadron in the Northern sector, 207 having been returned to England for re-equipment.

The Squadron was the first in action in the great Naval attack on Zeebrugge Mole on the 22nd April when the Navy, under Admiral Lord Keyes, effected a landing and the block ships "Intrepid" and "Iphigenia" were sunk in the fairway of the Zeebrugge-Bruges Canal. This action also drew the attention of the German Command from the Somme bulge, who then expected a landing by our forces on the Belgian coast.

More heavy bombing squadrons of Handley-Page machines were being formed and experienced personnel of the Squadron were being posted to their strength, with the result that only the nucleus of trained air-crews was left; but this difficulty was surmounted by recruiting regular aircraft personnel for duties as "back gunners." Many a mechanic, clerk, and even once an armourer, volunteered.

So many men of the crews did fine service—pilots, observers and the gunlayers, who in many ways had the most trying task of all, because of their vigilant isolation in the rear of the machine—that it would be invidious to mention any names, or to mention the many well-deserved awards that they received. Several members of the flying personnel having 50 or 60 raids to their credit.

But perhaps, apart from the name of Squadron Leader Brackley, the names of that fine pilot, Squadron Leader Darley, who carried out the historic low-level attack on the lock gates at Bruges, and tragically lost his life while flying (on pioneer work) after the war; and Wing Commander Spenser Grey, another inspiring leader, and Mr. Bert Hinkle, who later made the first flight to Australia, might be mentioned. And who could ever forget the cheerful and comforting figure of Captain "Charlie" Tyrer who sent the machines off at night—and saw them home!

Month after month the Squadron worked on, almost without interruption. Then in May 1918 came tragedy, though not disaster.

The Germans, who had evidently been much concerned by the continuous heavy bombardments, decided to make a mass attack on the base from which the British attack had come.

Such a raid had been foreseen. Decoy aerodromes had been prepared some miles away from Dunkirk, with runway flares to deceive the German airmen.

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5th June
On the evening of the 5th May, 1918, just after the machines had left on a raid, a solitary machine circled the aerodrome, suddenly dropped a line of bombs and opened machine-gun fire, causing casualties, several fatal, in the surprise attack.

The following night came a mass attack of heavy German bombers against the aerodrome, which was a grim and unforgettable experience for those who were there. Altogether in the raids no fewer than 740 bombs were dropped by 40 machines in this concentrated raid which caused a number of casualties and much damage.

But even then the work of No. 214 was not interrupted, and the Handley-Pages set out, as usual, on their own raids, using the coastal sands at Fort Mardych, west of Dunkerque, as an emergency aerodrome.

These same sands were in 1940 to be the site of the greatest battle in England's history when, deserted by our Allies, our army defied the full force of the German Navy, Army and Air Force, and made a fighting retreat back to its own shores.

But it meant the end—and a sad end—to the base at Coudekerque which everyone had grown to like, as their environment when away from their home in England.

About a month later the Squadron resumed its work at St. Inglevert, between Calais and Boulogne. The task was becoming harder. German night fighters were beginning to get active. Still the machines went out—often to the old well-known targets—and returned, with occasional tragic gaps, for the care and attention of the patient good-humoured ground crews.

Then, as the war approached its end, the Squadron moved again—for a short time to Quellin—and then on to Camphin, near Lille, which for so long had been in enemy territory.

And on the very last night of the war, on the night of November 10-11, 1918, machines of No. 214 raided the railway station at Louvain where, owing to the Germans' hurry to get away, the target was well-lighted, and there was hardly any opposition.

A few hours later the War was over. The active work of No. 214 Squadron of the First World War came to an end, though it proceeded next year to Egypt before being disbanded at Abu Seir early in 1920.

Never in the history of England has a task of such magnitude been achieved by ten machines and 200 Officers and men commanded by a gallant and courageous Officer but still a young man, for "Brackles" was then in his 24th year, and not only the Nation but the whole Allied cause depended on their work.

NOTE.

While this is essentially a history of the Squadron in the First World War it should be recorded that No. 214 Squadron, which was reformed as a heavy bombing Squadron in 1935, carried on the same tradition with a remarkable record of work right through the Second World War.

It is interesting to note that its work was very largely on naval targets, and in co-operation with the Navy. In September, 1940, when an attempt at invasion was thought possible, it attacked concentrations of barges and shipping at Channel ports, including the old target of Ostende. It later attacked Bremen and Wilhelmshaven. It attacked ports from which sub-

marines were provisioned and refitted. Again and again it went out to bomb the "Scharnhorst" and "Gneisenau" at Brest, and it took part in the attempt to intercept the two German warships when they escaped North through the Dover Straits.

It took part in the tremendous raid against Peenemunde in the Baltic which is believed to have retarded the "V.1" long range weapon programme by six months: and by showering radar-deceiving strips of aluminium at the time of the Normandy landings helped materially to delude the enemy air force so that the airborne invasion enjoyed comparative immunity from fighter attack.

CAPTAIN CHARLIE

He stands upon the bandstand bare
With Whiskey and eyeglass and never a care
Till he catches the glimpse of a Handley's Light
He calls for a flare or a rocket white
And the Pilot breathes a thankful prayer,
Or, possibly begins to swear.

A "Bandstand" now he calls his perch
Before a *grandstand*, maybe a church
Tomorrow perhaps the bridge of a launch
Or an African river, (bad for the paunch)
Or the glittering throne of far Siam
And thirty-one wines (forgetful of lamb).

T'was first upon far Congo's tide
With thirteen men and a dusky bride
He conquers cities, captures towns
Made daisy chains of Niggers crowns
All by the aid of one glass eye
And a bottle of Whiskey, and a ready lie.

And our children's children's, children dear
Shall from bard and minstrels hear
How Charlie spite of demons yell
And shells of brimstone, captured Hell
Till 'Strike me ruddywell perishing pink'
'Though its beastly hot, there's nothing to drink
So leaving his Mess Bills to earth he returned
And quenched in good Whiskey the thirst that burned
And settled down in Leicester Square
With a "Bird"—but that's his affair.

CAMPFIN, NORD, FRANCE, 1919.

The authors accept no responsibility for this Ode, all enquiries should be addressed to the Vice-Presidents.