

Surviving ORBs which are over 30 years old are open to the public and are at TNA in the following classes:

RAF and Commonwealth squadrons (AIR 27), RAF Regiment squadrons (AIR 29), South African Air Force units (AIR 54), Wings (AIR 26), Groups (AIR 25), Commands (AIR 24), Stations (AIR 28), Other RAF units: OTUs etc. (AIR 29), FAA squadrons: Second World War (ADM 207), Army Air Corps squadrons: from 1957 (WO 295).

Some material relating to operations by specific squadrons can be found among the files of the appropriate command in other AIR record classes at the TNA. For example, reports on operations involving No. 192 Squadron are amongst Bomber Command records in class AIR 14.

ORBs which are less than thirty years old are held by the Air Historical Branch of the Ministry of Defence. Bona fide researchers may apply to the Branch for the release of information from such books.

Combat Reports 1939-1945

The main collection of combat reports is held by TNA in class AIR 50. The Royal Air Force Museum has an incomplete collection of combat reports from RAF fighter squadrons during the Second World War. Many of these are carbon copies, however, and may not be easily legible.

Further Research

Histories have been published for many RAF squadrons, and may still be in print. Please write to the Department of Research and Information Services if you require further advice on these or other sources.

The Fleet Air Arm Museum may be able to supply more information on FAA and RNAS units. The Museum of Army Flying may be able to help concerning Army Air Corps and RFC squadrons, and the Glider Pilot Regiment.

Further information on many more sources, especially official records, is given in: S Fowler, P Elliott, R C Nesbit & C Goulter, *RAF Records in the PRO* (PRO Publications, 1994), which also covers RFC, RNAS and FAA records. TNA's website also gives advice on using the records held there.

Addresses

The National Archives

Ruskin Avenue
Kew
Richmond
Surrey TW9 4DU
Tel: 020 8876 3444
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Air Historical Branch (RAF)

Building 824
RAF Northolt
West End Road
Ruislip
Middlesex HA4 6NG

Museum of Army Flying

Middle Wallop
Stockbridge
Hampshire
SO20 8DY
tel:01980 674421
www.flying-museum.org.uk

Department of Printed Books

Imperial War Museum
Lambeth Road
London
SE1 6HZ
tel: 020 7416 5000
www.iwm.org.uk

Fleet Air Arm Museum

Box D6
RNAS Yeovilton
Ilchester
Somerset BA22 8HT
tel: 01935 840565
www.fleetairarm.com

Department of Research & Information Services Information Sheet No.3 Royal Air Force Unit Records

Most of the surviving records compiled by units of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC: 1912–1918), Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS: 1914–1918) and RAF (from 1918) are held at The National Archives (TNA – formerly the Public Record Office). This leaflet describes the records available there and at the Royal Air Force Museum. It also covers records of the FAA, RAAF, RCAF, SAAF and RNZAF.

Researchers wishing to view material held in the Royal Air Force Museum's library and archives should make an appointment by telephone, fax or e-mail with the Department of Research and Information Services well in advance of their proposed visit. Enquiries should be made in writing (enclosing an SAE), mentioning any sources which have already been consulted.

The titles of books are given in italics. Most books mentioned here are in the Royal Air Force Museum's Library, and may also be held by The National Archives, the Imperial War Museum and other museums.

Separate information sheets are available from the Department of Research and Information Services about other topics of research, such as RAF personnel records and aircraft or airfield histories.

**Department of Research & Information Services
Royal Air Force Museum, Grahame Park Way, Hendon,
London NW9 5LL Tel: 020 8205 2266 Fax: 020 8200 1751**

**website: www.rafmuseum.org
e-mail: research@rafmuseum.org**

First World War (also see later sections):

The official history of the flying services in the First World War gives some information on the operations of individual squadrons: W Raleigh & H A Jones *The War in the Air*, 6 Vols. (Oxford University Press, 1922-1937). T Henshaw, *The Sky Their Battlefield* (Grub Street, 1995) also includes information on the daily operations of First World War squadrons.

Summaries of the history of First World War RFC, RNAS and RAF fighter squadrons are given in: C F Shores, N L R Franks & R Guest, *Above the Trenches. A Complete Record of the Fighter Aces and Units of the British Empire Air Forces, 1915–1920* (Grub Street, 1990).

RFC, RNAS and RAF squadrons kept war diaries, and those which have survived are in the AIR 1 class at TNA, together with casualty returns and some combat reports. The Royal Air Force Museum also has a collection of First World War combat reports. Very few records compiled by training units or stations have survived.

The RFC and RAF Communiqués, giving weekly summaries of operations, have been published in three volumes:

- C Cole, *Royal Flying Corps 1915–1916* (William Kimber, 1969)
- C Bowyer, *Royal Flying Corps Communiqués 1917–1918* (Grub Street, 1998)
- C Cole, *Royal Air Force 1918* (William Kimber, 1968).

Original copies of the RAF Communiqués are in TNA in class AIR 1/2097/207/14/1, and RNAS Communiqués are in AIR 1/2314/223/112. TNA does not hold any RFC Communiqués. The Royal Air Force Museum holds almost complete sets of RFC/RAF Communiqués and RNAS Operations Reports.

From the 1920s to the Present Day:

K Delve, *The Sourcebook of the RAF* (Airlife, 1994) gives brief summaries of the histories of squadrons, wings, groups and commands, and includes orders of battle for various periods in RAF history. C G Jefford, *RAF Squadrons* (Airlife, 1988) lists the airfields and aircraft used by individual squadrons, and also includes maps showing the locations of major airfields throughout the world at which RFC, RNAS and RAF squadrons have been based.

Summaries of squadron histories are also given in:

- J Rawlings, *Fighter Squadrons of the RAF and their Aircraft* (Crecy Books, 1993)
- P Moyes, *Bomber Squadrons of the RAF and their Aircraft* (Macdonald, 1976)
- J Rawlings, *Coastal, Support and Special Squadrons of the RAF and their Aircraft* (Jane's, 1982).

Accounts of the daily operations of Bomber and Fighter Command in the Second World War are given in:

- M Middlebrook & C Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries* (Viking, 1985)
- J Foreman, *Fighter Command War Diaries. Vol. 1: Sept 1939 – Sept 1940; Vol. 2: Sept 1940 – Dec 1941; Vol. 3 Jan 1942 – June 1943; Vol. 4: July 1943 – June 1944; Vol 5 July 1944 – May 1945* (Air Research Publications, 1996 & 2004).

Brief summaries of the history of various training units - such as schools, conversion units, operational training units (OTUs) and training squadrons - maintenance and repair units, university air squadrons, numbered flights, groups, wings and other support units, from the First World War onwards, are given in: R Sturtivant & J Hamlin, *Royal Air Force Training and Support Units since 1912* (Air-Britain, 2007).

Fleet Air Arm (FAA) Squadrons

R Sturtivant & T Ballance, *The Squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm* (Air-Britain, 1994) gives information on FAA squadrons (with squadron numbers in the range 700-899, 1700-1853), FAA land bases, aircraft carriers, and other ships and units involved in aviation at sea from the 1920s. Further information on FAA units can be found in: R Sturtivant & D Cronin, *Fleet Air Arm Aircraft, Units and Ships 1920 to 1939* (Air-Britain, 1998).

Polish RAF Squadrons

The history of the Polish RAF squadrons (Nos. 300-309, 315-318, 663) in the Second World War is given in: J B Cynk, *The Polish Air Force at War: The Official History: Vol. 1 (1939–1943)* (Schiffer, 1998).

Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Units

Histories of RAAF units are given in a series of books: RAAF Historical Section, *Units of the Royal Australian Air Force:*

A Concise History, 10 Vols. (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1995). These include fighter units (Vol. 2), bomber units (Vol. 3), maritime and support units (Vol. 4) and training units (Vol. 7).

Casualties

Bomber Command and Fighter Command Losses record the daily wartime losses of squadrons in these commands. More information about researching individual casualties is given in the Royal Air Force Museum's information sheet on personnel records.

- W R Chorley, *RAF Bomber Command Losses (Vol. 1: 1939–40; Vol. 2: 1941; Vol. 3: 1942; Vol. 4: 1943; Vol. 5: 1944; Vol. 6: 1945; Vol. 7 (OTUs 1940–1947), Vol. 8 (HCUs & miscellaneous units) and Vol. 9 (Roll of honour 1939–1947)* (Midland Counties Publications, 1992–2007).

- N L R Franks, *Fighter Command Losses. Vol. 1: 1939–1941; Vol. 2: 1942–1943; Vol. 3: 1944–1945 (including 2nd Tactical Air Force and Air Defence Great Britain)* (Midland Publishing, 1997, 1998 & 2000).

Unit Records

Operations Record Books (ORBs or RAF Forms 540 & 541) as war diaries were called from the 1920s, were compiled by all units, including stations and non-flying units, whether operational or not. The quality and amount of information contained in ORBs can vary, depending for example on the thoroughness of the compiling officer.

Some squadron ORBs are quite detailed, listing for each flight the aircraft serial number, pilot/crew details, flight times and general information on each flight. Others may only mention flights which involved combat. Some units had to destroy their records, for example when retreating during the Battle of France in 1940.

In the case of very busy units, such as flying training schools and operational training units, it was not possible to go into great detail about every flight: only events such as accidents would be deemed worthy of note. Command and Group ORBs are likely to contain copies of Operations Orders and to give an overview of each day's operations.