



AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE

# R·A·F



BATTLE OF BRITAIN 50TH ANNIVERSARY  
COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

ROY CONYERS NESBIT

FOREWORD BY

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## FOREWORD

At the beginning of September, 1940, I joined 616 (South Yorkshire) Squadron at Coltishall in Norfolk. They had just arrived from Kenley, near Croydon, and in eight days had lost five pilots, killed or missing, with five others wounded and in hospital, and had been 'taken out of the line' to regain their strength. These were bad times for the Squadron, Fighter Command, and England, because the Germans, having conquered Europe in six weeks with *Blitzkrieg*, their new and terrifying style of air-ground warfare, were using the same strategy against these Islands – their intention being to take out Fighter Command and gain air superiority so that their *panzers* could cross the Channel unopposed; and during those fine autumn days they nearly succeeded because we were losing one hundred and twenty five experienced pilots each week who could only be replaced by sixty-five inexperienced pilots like me.

One would have thought, therefore, that with Fighter Command wasting away morale might have been a little shaken. On the contrary, it was superb, and this was well-illustrated to me when one evening all off duty ranks were recalled to the airfield.

Once there, we found Alert No 1, 'invasion imminent and probable within twelve hours', had been declared and our defences were to be brought to the highest state of readiness. The officer's mess was crowded, confused and noisy – that is until Squadron Leader Douglas Bader stumped in and demanded to know what all the flap was about. On being told, he said: 'So the bastards are coming. Bloody good show! Think of all those juicy targets on those nice flat beaches. What shooting!' And he made a rude sound with his lips which was meant to resemble a ripple of machine-gun fire. This was my first encounter with the already legendary Douglas Bader. His spirited and spontaneous riposte serves as a good example of how high morale was, even though the odds were stacked against us.

This book has been written in an easily accessible and informative style which charts the development of the Royal Air Force from the days of experimental balloons and kites, to the modern sophistication of today's advanced technology. It is superbly illustrated with photographs, diagrams and posters, many previously unpublished. These factors combine to produce what I consider to be a vivid and fascinating portrait of the Royal Air Force, surely a fitting tribute to the men and women with whom I served, and to those who today maintain its traditions of enthusiasm, high spirits and comradeship.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnnie Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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