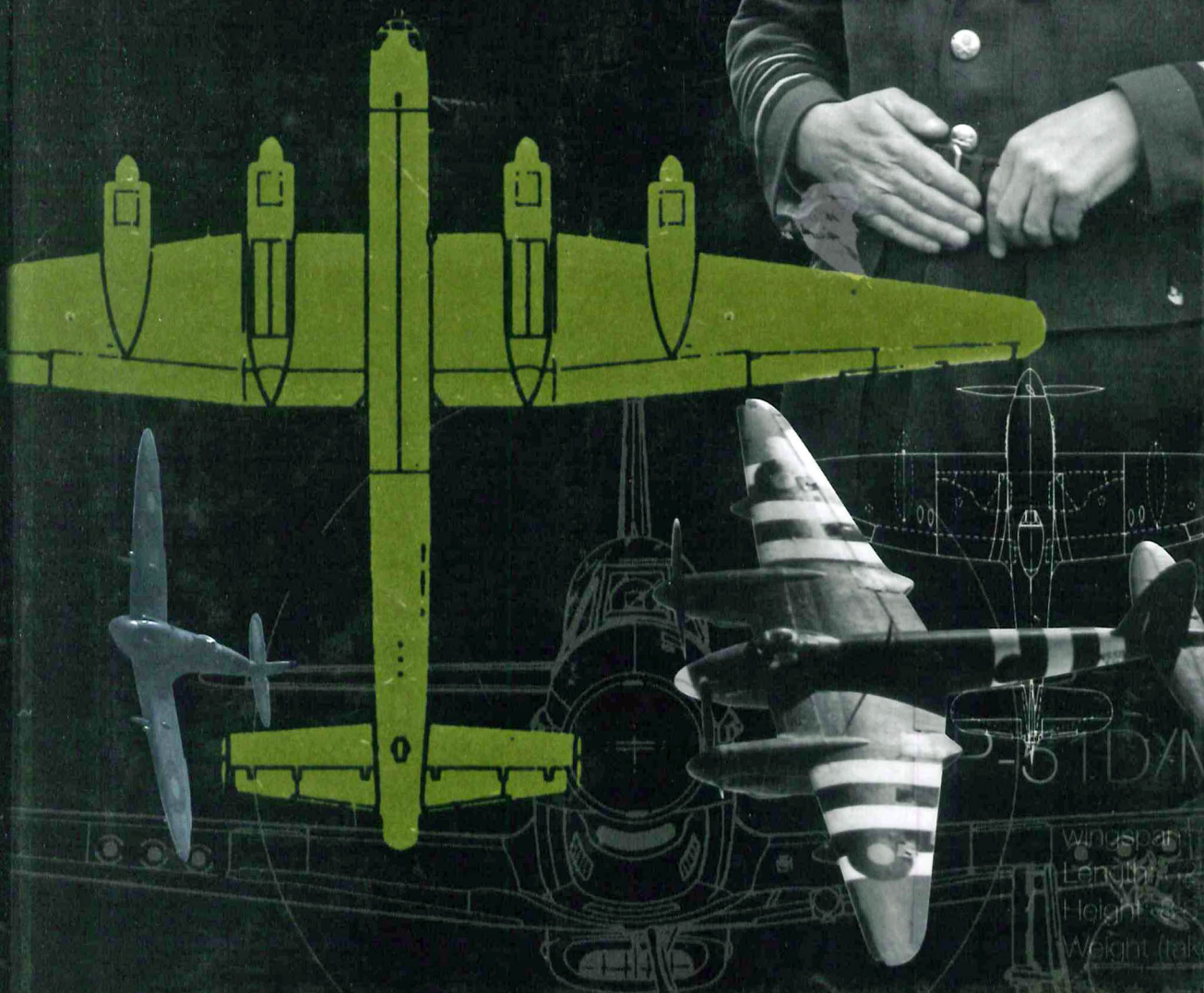


ANTHONY FURSE

Wilfrid Freeman

THE GENIUS BEHIND
ALLIED SURVIVAL AND AIR
SUPREMACY 1939 TO 1945



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Contents

Foreword <i>by</i> THE LATE PROFESSOR R.V. JONES CH	7
Preface	14
Abbreviations	17
CHAPTER 1: Family background	19
CHAPTER 2: War service in the Royal Flying Corps 1914–1918	24
CHAPTER 3: The promotion ladder	47
CHAPTER 4: Air Member for Research and Development	59
CHAPTER 5: Development and production 1938–39	83
CHAPTER 6: War: the production alternatives clarified	99
CHAPTER 7: Aircraft design and development: September 1939 to May 1940	117
CHAPTER 8: ‘Magic is nine-tenths illusion’ – the Beaverbrook myth	133
CHAPTER 9: An unwelcome role: Vice-Chief of the Air Staff	147
CHAPTER 10: The supremely competent VCAS	159
CHAPTER 11: Developing a Tactical Air Force: the Middle East, 1940–42	175
CHAPTER 12: Freeman and RAF bombing policy	195
CHAPTER 13: Freeman’s influence on US aircraft procurement policy	211
CHAPTER 14: The triumph of the Mustang	225
CHAPTER 15: Chaos at the Ministry of Aircraft Production: Freeman’s return	239
CHAPTER 16: A Herculean task	248
CHAPTER 17: MAP: the climax of the war	291
CHAPTER 18: Peace: glimpses of a great industrialist	283
APPENDIX I: Abbreviated extracts from Memorandum on Aircraft Development Policy	299
APPENDIX II: The effects of technical difficulties and new operational requirements on production of new aircraft	301
APPENDIX III: Freeman’s letters to Beaverbrook	303

APPENDIX IV: The Shell-Mex House saga	307
APPENDIX V: Freeman's comments on Trenchard's criticisms of a paper circulated by Beaverbrook	309
APPENDIX VI: Freeman's letter to Portal on bombing policy	312
APPENDIX VII: Bufton's secret and personal letter to Harris	315
APPENDIX VIII: The essentials of the heavy bomber programme	320
APPENDIX IX: Aero-engine development and performance 1936 to 1945	323
Appendix x: The design and development of airframes for the RAF	339
Notes	353
Bibliography	375
Index	377

AIRCRAFT NAMING POLICY

Production versions of World War II military aircraft were named differently by the combatants. RAF aircraft are usually referred to by names alone, such as Spitfire, Mosquito or Lancaster. American planes often had names as well as a numbered category, thus B-17 Flying Fortress or P-47 Thunderbolt. Although German aircraft are usually referred to by their maker's acronym and a number as He 177, Ju 88 or FW 190, most histories, and the pages that follow, refer to aircraft designed by Messerschmitt for the Bayerische Flugzeugwerke before the company was renamed in 1938, as the Me 109 or Me 110 rather than Bf 109 or Bf 110.

Preface

WILFRID FREEMAN died in May 1953. The fact that no one else has yet attempted to recount his magnificent services to his country and to the Royal Air Force and USAAF is no reflection on his almost unique importance to the activities of the Royal Air Force in the Second World War.

Well known authors like Denis Richards and John Terraine both refused because his papers had disappeared, and no professional author could afford the time to extract the vital needles of information from the great haystack of files in the Public Record Office and the other museums and archives.

Jeffrey Quill, the brilliant Spitfire test pilot, and most charming and modest of great men, embarked on the task in 1986, helped by Sebastian Cox from the Air Historical Branch of the RAF, who masterminded a comprehensive review of the most likely records, most of them in the PRO. This search was conducted with relentless precision by Sebastian Ritchie, a very young and able historian.

Failing health eventually obliged Quill to withdraw, after receiving much help on early chapters from Peter Pimblett. Cox also eventually found that he was unable to spare adequate time on the biography, due to the pressures of a family and a full time job. With characteristic generosity, he decided that his role would be to help me, which he has done with endless patience and the phenomenal depth of his background knowledge.

Freeman's achievements were such that all those who became involved over the past twelve years have been fascinated, and have given their time and help without stint. Sadly many of them have since died, including Quill who got the project going, but I am immensely grateful to him and to the others, particularly Air Vice-Marshal S.O. Bufton, Lords Nelson of Stafford, Cheshire and Kings Norton, Air Marshal Sir Denis Crowley-Milling, Sir John and Lady Richmond, Harald Penrose, Ronald Kerr-Muir and J.V. Connolly. To this list must be added, alas, Professor R.V. Jones, who has always looked forward to such a biography, and read early drafts, contributed personal letters and made vital comments and wrote the Foreword, and Betty Whitcombe who befriended Wilfrid and Elizabeth Richmond in Palestine, and filled in much about his personal life at that critical time.

Lord Plowden, Sir Alec Cairncross and Sir Peter Masefield, all of whom worked with Freeman at MAP, Sir Arthur Knight, a colleague at Courtaulds, Dr Alex Moulton and Peter Ware who assisted Roy Fedden at Bristol, Sir Robert Lickley of Hawker Siddeley, Dr Robert Feilden who worked under Frank Whittle during the war, Margaret Hitchcock, Tommy's widow and Air Chief Marshal Sir Kenneth Cross who served under Tedder in 1941-42, all gave valuable help.

My cousin Anne Beese, Freeman's much loved eldest daughter, kept all his letters to her, generously giving me access to them and, with her sisters Susan Malcolm and Joan Morgan-Grenville, to his fascinating letters to their mothers. The letters and family diaries have been a mine of information about their father and the Freeman family, and I am deeply grateful to them and Christopher Beese who helped to make it possible. Despite failing health his sister-in-law Eileen Freeman gave sparkling memories of Wilfrid and the Freeman family with her usual, buoyant wit. Yet another Freeman cousin, Dr Mark Walker researched the early history of the amphetamine sulphate drug, Benzedrine.

Andrew Nahum at the Science Museum explained the problems of the aero-engines of the First World War, and Mike Evans and Dave Piggott of the Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust responded to much more detailed questions about the later Rolls-Royce engines in authoritative detail, helped by the expert drawings of Lyndon Jones. Robert and Donna Neal had all the facts about Packard Merlins, whilst Patrick Hassall, John Heaven and Peter Pavey talked or wrote about the problems and progress of the Bristol radials with great patience – a saga that was further explained by the discoveries of their Heritage librarian, Denis Hunt. The administrators of the Roosevelt Museum at Hyde Park, NY, which houses the Roosevelt, Hopkins and Winant archives, the RAF Museum at Hendon, the Imperial War Museum, the Royal Aeronautical Society and the Archivists of the Churchill and Portal papers all turned up documents which were vital to the story. I am most grateful to them and to the town librarians at Mold who went to endless trouble discovering rare and unusual books.

Jack Bruce and Stuart Leslie were a marvellous source of information and photographs of World War I aircraft and of the Royal Flying Corps.

The charming Anne Rowley-Williams, 'sheep-farmer's wife extraordinary', made sense of endless dictated drafts, and long tape-recorded interviews. My three sons taught me the basics of successive word-processors choosing and programming them, and staying calm and constructive when the 'frustrations of a computer illiterate' burst over the telephone. My wife endured six years of cluttered rooms, visits and visitors with exemplary patience.

Colonel Geoffrey Powell, Air Vice-Marshal Tony Mason, John Borron, Sarah Lush, William Goldie, Patrick Hassell and Anthony Price all made time to read drafts, and their encouragement at critical moments was heart warming. Dr Sebastian Ritchie deserves even greater thanks, for he diverted many hours of his spare time to the work of editing, contributing invaluable additions to chapters on aircraft production, and the Middle East and performing the essential surgery when the task of further editing seemed intolerable.

Finally my thanks and sincere admiration for Elwyn Blacker and his team at Pardoe Blacker. They instantly recognised the historic uniqueness of Freeman's achievements, and their composition, and expert contributions have made this somewhat technical tale more readable than I could have possibly expected.

Without this help I doubt whether that tangled web, those slivers of detailed information, would ever have been assembled into a story. Most of the advice and guidance has been superb, always touched by unreserved admiration for that remarkable man, and if, despite every care there are errors, or conclusions which later prove unjustified, the fault can only be mine.

'Freeman's outstanding personality and magnetism attracted the [aircraft] industry and made them feel a sense of relief that there was now this key man at the [Air] Ministry, a man of piercing perception ... ready to take instant decisions ... the most inspiring man I ever served.'

– G.P. BULMAN, AIR MINISTRY ENGINE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, 1937

'Freeman possessed to a remarkable extent, the gift of inspiring confidence and attracting loyalty ... few people appreciate the supreme debt that we all owe to Freeman for his courage and leadership.' – MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE LORD TEDDER

'It was the expansion which was carried out under Freeman's direction in 1937/9 which enabled the Battle of Britain to be won. Without that foresight and imagination, no efforts in 1940 would have yielded any results.' – LORD HIVES

'You [Freeman] more than any other man gave the Royal Air Force the machines whose superior quality won the vital battles of the summer ... to your vision more than any other factor do we owe the victories that saved our country.' – LORD BEAVERBROOK

'Freeman virtually took charge of the internal policy governing the enormous expansion of the Royal Air Force'

– MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE LORD PORTAL

'I am confident that the Lancaster will prove to be the outstanding aircraft of the war, and it is largely due to you that it has come into existence.' – ROY CHADWICK (*Avro's Chief Designer*) TO WILFRID FREEMAN

'The Mosquito has claims to be considered the outstanding aircraft of the Royal Air Force ... Its successful emergence as the only unarmed bomber of an air force in the Second World War was due to the brilliance of the conception and design backed by the wisdom and courage of Wilfrid Freeman.' – MAURICE DEAN

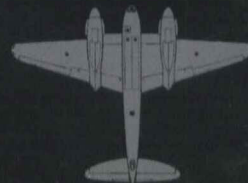
'... the epitome of wisdom, candour and loyalty ... brilliantly successful in foreseeing the needs of the service ... [a] genius for distinguishing what is right ... for finding the truth and exposing the superficial ... [displaying] steadfast courage in making and defending many crucial and difficult decisions.'

– MARSHAL OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE LORD PORTAL

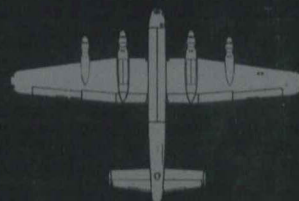
'If I had to single out the senior Air Officer who has had least recognition from posterity for the magnitude of his contribution it would be Wilfrid Freeman.' – THE LATE PROFESSOR R.V. JONES CH



Spitfire



Mosquito



Lancaster



Mustang

