

# The SQUADRONS of the ROYAL AIR FORCE & COMMONWEALTH 1918~1988



an Air-Britain publication

James J Halley

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# Foreword

In 1980, Air-Britain published the forerunner of this volume which, for the first time, gave detailed information on the movements and equipment of all Royal Air Force squadrons. In the next few years, 'The Squadrons of the Royal Air Force' found a wide market and became the standard reference on the subject. In the year when the Royal Air Force celebrates its Seventieth Anniversary, a new and enlarged edition seemed appropriate.

Since 1980, considerable research has been undertaken into the greyer areas of squadron moves and equipment and a vast amount of new material has been released to the Public Record Office covering the post-war years, while extensive perusal of the mass of papers covering World War One has shown that some records found in the past revealed intentions rather than reality. More reliable records have been exhumed which give a stronger feeling of accuracy and have been adopted in place of the earlier discoveries. There have been numerous changes to the locations and equipment of Royal Air Force squadrons during the 1980s and these have been incorporated.

The first volume covered only Royal Air Force squadrons. In this new edition, we have incorporated, in the same form, details of all the Commonwealth squadrons which came under Royal Air Force operational control. These are often thought of as being only those squadrons which were allotted numbers in the 400-series. As a result, many squadrons which formed an integral part of the Royal Air Force's command structure have been omitted in the past. Notable examples are No.10 Squadron, RAAF, which spent the entire war in the UK as part of Coastal Command, and No.3 Squadron, RAAF, which served in the Desert Air Force throughout the war. The South African Air Force did not use the '400' numbering system but a considerable number of SAAF squadrons served in Royal Air Force Commands. Heretofore, they have been virtually ignored since they did not fall into the RAF's numbering pattern.

Australian and Canadian squadrons were formed for service during World War One and these have also been incorporated in this book. By including Commonwealth units under Royal Air Force operational control, a more complete Order of

Battle can be compiled for any given date by checking through the tables herein.

During the past eight years, we have been delighted to receive many letters pointing out discrepancies and giving details of the writers' own service in the Squadrons. These have been invaluable in locating areas of doubt, even if not all memories could be confirmed from the records!

As in the first edition, the movement dates have been taken as being the date on which the bulk of a squadron's aircraft moved. While in Europe the ground echelons would normally arrive within a day or two, possibly before the aircraft, in areas like India the aircrews could be in action for many days – a gap of two weeks was not uncommon – while their ground crews were fighting the Indian rail and river systems. 'Official' dates have been used for peacetime moves except where the operations record books show that there were considerable delays due, mainly, to weather. Several feet of snow covering all airfields in the UK seldom seemed to impinge on those issuing the movement directives. Thus intention and reality once more tended to part company.

Individual acknowledgements appear at the end of the book but we must again acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of the Air Historical Branch and the Public Relations Branch of the Ministry of Defence to provide us with unclassified information on the formation, disbandment and movement dates for those years when squadron records are not open to the general public. The assistance of their equivalents in the Royal Australian Air Force, Canadian Armed Forces, Royal New Zealand Air Force and South African Air Force is much appreciated.

The guardians of the public records in the Public Record Office have produced many tons of files and documents over the years and the Royal Air Force Museum has freely opened its extensive archives and photographic libraries.

To all those who have helped, we are very grateful.

James J Halley  
Shepperton  
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