

Book Reviews

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE DAY BY DAY 1918-2018



BY AIR COMMODORE GRAHAM PITCHFORK

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REVIEWED BY DR ALASTAIR NOBLE

Biography: Dr Alastair Noble has been a Historian in the Air Historical Branch (RAF) since September 2015. He was previously a Senior Lecturer in Defence and International Affairs at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and Senior Researcher in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians section.

INTRODUCTION

This updated, revamped edition of Air Commodore Graham Pitchfork's *The Royal Air Force Day by Day* has been published, at the request of the RAF, to mark the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Service. The foreword by the Chief of the Air Staff reinforces the official acknowledgement of Pitchfork's work. Indeed, this is an invaluable diary of important daily events in the RAF's rich history. The clear and concise entries not only chronicle major milestones and great air battles but reach beyond these to incorporate diverse snapshots of everyday life in the RAF and the tasks, traditions, culture and lifestyles this has encompassed. This book looks at the RAF from all angles, at all levels and at all stages in its history. Although matters relating to the Second World War are crucial to the story and are not neglected, little known interwar operations are brought to life, while Cold War and post-Cold War activities are recounted with relish. As well as highlighting the RAF's constantly evolving role in air defence and the delivery of air power, its long-standing role in peacekeeping and international aid operations across the globe is underlined.

This is a book which is good to look at. It is a book which is very easy to dip into. However, it is somewhat harder to extract oneself from it. The sheer breadth of the

entries partially account for this, coupled with the sure touch of the author in conveying the developments and events which shaped the Service. The extensive, carefully selected black and white photographs which accompany the text likewise endeavour to cover the varied facets of RAF life through the decades.

This book also provides an excellent starting point. It is a valuable ‘one stop shop’ for RAF history, providing an impetus for further reading on the people of the Service, their achievements and their gallantry. On the latter, there is a particular focus on RAF recipients of the George Cross and Victoria Cross. The brief entries provide a flavour of the courage of individuals, an enduring feature of the RAF’s history. In addition, this new edition features more panels covering particular aspects in greater detail, ranging from the first flight to India (December 1918-January 1919) to the Olympic Operation GUARDIAN in 2012. The helpful cross-referencing leads to the discovery of yet more fascinating facts. These frequently emphasise the versatility of the RAF, its aircraft and its aircrew. For instance, the Handley Page V/1500 four-engine heavy bomber, *Old Carthusian*, which made the long flight to India in 1918/19 was soon pressed into service bombing the Amir Ammanulla’s palace in Kabul; this display of air power severely denting the morale of the insurgents and helping to bring the conflict to a close.

Although it has an incredibly wide and challenging remit, *The Royal Air Force Day by Day* has sound foundations. It is the product of years of wide-ranging research, incorporating archival work at The National Archives and Air Historical Branch (RAF), as well as a thorough examination of papers, journals, magazines and books central to the RAF’s past and present. Indeed, to a degree this book goes beyond its chronological remit with entries and photographs in respect of the innovations and deeds of the pre-April 1918 Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service.

At the outset, Air Commodore Pitchfork took on a stiff task with this ambitious project. The revised, updated edition builds on the success of the 2008 edition and will be a most welcome and durable addition to the many books published to celebrate the centenary of the Service.

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