

## The History of the ATC

**A**ir Commodore J A Chamier is regarded as the father of the air cadet movement. He was the son of a major-general and joined the Army himself as a regular officer. In the Army he learned to fly and was loaned to the Royal Flying Corps (the forerunner of the Royal Air Force) during World War 1. He transferred to the Royal Air Force in 1919 and eventually retired from service in 1929, at the age of 50.

His love of aviation and his tremendous capacity for hard work was such that, following his retirement, he became the Secretary-General of the Air League - an organisation made up of people who could see a bright future for aviation and who wanted to make the British public aware of its potential. Against a background of rising interest in aviation and with the clouds of war beginning to form over Europe, Air Commodore Chamier thought of the idea of starting an aviation cadet corps.



*Air Commodore J A Chamier*

He knew that in the 1914-1918 war, in desperate moments, hand picked young men with only a few hours of training were sent to do combat in the air – only to fall victim to well trained enemy aviators. He knew also that the winning of air power would need the services of many highly skilled and highly trained men using the best equipment and that the sooner such training could be started the better.

In 1938 Air Commodore Chamier came up with a plan to form an Air Defence Cadet Corps (ADCC). His idea was to attract and train young men who had an interest in aviation, from all over the country. He planned to set up Squadrons of young cadets in as many towns and cities as possible, and ask local people to organise and run them.

Air Commodore Chamier's idea seemed to capture the mood of the British people at the time. In their eagerness to help the nation in preparation for war, young men rushed to join the Corps in their thousands. The cadets were asked to pay a weekly subscription of 3d (old pennies) which today is equivalent to 1p. This seems very little by today's standards, but when you consider that the £1 in the mid 1930s would probably be worth about £50.00 at today's prices, the cadets were paying the equivalent of 63p each week. Although the plan was that uniforms were to be issued free of charge, in many cases the cadet had to buy his own. The cost of a tunic in 1939 was 72p, the equivalent cost in 1999 would be approximately £40.

It was never easy, in the early days of the Corps, finding people to set up and run new squadrons and it was thought that a spur to greater effort was needed. So, soon after their own formation the ADCC HQ announced that the first 50 Squadrons registered would be known as Founder Squadrons and be entitled to put the letter F after their squadron number.



*ADCC uniform*

Each squadron's aim was to prepare cadets for joining the RAF or the Fleet Air Arm. They tried to give the cadet as much Service and aviation background as possible as well as giving instruction in drill, discipline, how to wear the uniform and how to behave on RAF stations.

The training the cadets received also meant development of personal physical fitness, PT, games and athletics, especially cross country running and long route marches, soon became standard squadron activities. Cadets were also encouraged to take part in activities such as shooting, camping and of course flying.

By 1939 the activities of the ADCC were severely restricted because of the approach of World War II. Many ADCC instructors and squadron officers were called up into the regular Service. Buildings were commandeered by either the Service or by local government for war work and cadets went to work on RAF stations. Cadets were used to carry messages, they helped with clerical duties, in providing extra muscle in handling aircraft and in the movement of stores and equipment. They filled thousands of sandbags and loaded miles of belts of ammunition.



*Cadets preparing a Beaufort for flight*

Throughout the early stages of the war, the government received many good reports as to the quality of cadet entering the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm. It was so impressed that it asked the ADCC to begin training young men who were waiting to be called into service. The ADCC willingly took on this very responsible job and in a very short space of time produced thousands of well qualified individuals who went on to pass quickly through basic training.

Towards the end of 1940 the government realised the true value of the work done by the ADCC and agreed to take over its control. This meant a large number of changes to the corps and in fact brought about the birth of a completely new organisation, called the Air Training Corps. So on the 5 February 1941 the Air Training Corps (ATC) was officially established, with King George VI very kindly agreeing to be Air Commodore-in-Chief, and issuing a Royal Warrant setting out the Corps' aims.

The number of young men responding to this new ATC was spectacular. Within the first month the size of the old ADCC had virtually doubled to more than 400 squadrons and after 12 months it was about 8 times as big. The new ATC badge was designed and once approved by the King; it was published in August 1941.



*The ATC Badge*

The motto *VENTURE ADVENTURE*, devised by Air Commodore Chamier, was adopted by the ATC and incorporated into the badge which, together with the ATC Ensign, was approved by the King. The ATC Ensign must at all times be given the same dignified and respectful treatment that members of the RAF give the Royal Air Force Ensign.



The falcon is a good choice for the ATC crest because it has many of the qualities a good cadet should have such as remarkable vision, enormous strength and incredible courage.

The new ATC squadrons adapted their training programmes to prepare young men for entry to the RAF in specific trades. They increased the amount of academic work and concentrated more on physical fitness by introducing a compulsory PT test. To pass the test the cadet had to be able to:

1. Run 100 yard (91.4 metres) in 13 seconds.
2. High jump 4 feet/1.22 m (or 2ft 9 inches/0.84 m from a standing jump).
3. Long jump 15 feet/4.5 m (or 6 ft/1.83 m - from a standing jump).
4. Clear 4 ft 3 inches/1.3 m with any style of vault.
5. Run 1 mile in 6 minutes.
6. Walk 5 miles in 1 hr 10 mins.

The Standards are not now compulsory, but something that a cadet could aim for. Squadrons often organised sporting events, swimming galas, boxing competitions, football and cricket matches both at local and national levels.

Squadrons would also arrange visits to RAF and Fleet Air Arm stations as part of the cadets' training and to let them fly as much as possible. Everybody wanted to fly but with so few flights available, in many cases, cadets were disappointed. One solution designed to ensure the cadets airborne was to introduce them to gliding. This would give the cadets a chance to experience the feel of an aircraft in flight and allow them to handle the controls. The plan was to give each cadet on annual camp at least one flight in a glider. This obviously could not happen overnight - sites had to be found, gliders obtained, instructors trained and so on. It would be many years before this dream could be realised.

The government did improve the flying situation however, in 1943, by setting up a special ATC Flight of 10 aircraft - Oxfords and Dominies, for the sole purpose of giving cadets air experience flights.



*Airspeed Oxford*

They also allowed cadets to go flying in RAF aircraft on normal Service flying activities and introduced a scheme of Overseas Flights to places like India and Egypt. A few years later the ATC Flight was replaced by 14 Avro Anson aircraft, located at airfields close to ATC Squadrons.



*Avro Anson*

But the Corps was about to change again. By the end of 1944 the allied forces in Europe had achieved air supremacy without losing as many men as they expected - the RAF therefore had too many aircrew! As a consequence of this, reductions on intake had to be made and large numbers of cadets waiting to join the Service were disappointed.

With the end of the war fast approaching, thoughts had to turn to the role of the ATC in peacetime. What was to happen to the ATC now that the need for air crew had reduced? Would the government still support the Corps during peacetime? Fears for the future of the ATC were fortunately unfounded. In 1945 the government announced that the ATC would be retained by becoming part of a recently formed Reserve Command. This helped the Corps enormously because, instead of just being an organisation with close links with the RAF, it now actually became part of it - with serving RAF officers at its head.

The ATC recognised the need to change its approach to training with the changing political situation and in 1947 a new Royal Warrant was issued outlining the new approach. This defined the aims of the Corps as:

- a. To promote and encourage among young men a practical interest in aviation and to fit them to serve their country in Our Air Force, its reserves and auxiliaries, and also in the Air Branch of Our Navy or in Our Army.
- b. To provide training which will be useful both in the Air Service and in civil life.
- c. To foster the spirit of adventure, to promote sports and pastimes in healthy rivalry and to develop the qualities of mind and body which go to the making of a leader and a good citizen.

So the ATC got down to work in its peacetime role and the strength of the Corps settled to about 30,000. In August 1947, 2 officers and 46 cadets went on a 3 week visit to Canada as guests of the Air League of Canada, and on the return trip they brought back some Canadian cadets for an exchange visit. This was the first in a series of exchanges that have taken place every year since then. The scheme soon became international, involving over 15 countries and in 1958 was officially called the International Air Cadet Exchange (IACE).



*Kirby Cadet Mk 3*

Throughout the war years gliding training continues to grow with enthusiasm. By 1946 the Corps had 350 Kirby Cadet gliders, with a further 50 waiting to be delivered and 115 on order, spread between 84 Elementary Gliding Schools located at various RAF stations around the country. It was at these Gliding Schools that the cadet would learn the basics of gliding by sitting at the controls and being winched across the airfield - a series of low or high hops, depending on the cadet's experience. In 1948 however a major change in policy was taken to improve the gliding training given to cadets. It was decided that training would take place in two seater aircraft - the cadet receiving instruction while actually flying. The first 2 seater used by the ATC was the Slingsby T21B called the Sedburgh and it was brought into service in 1950.



*Slingsby T21 Sedburgh*

Despite the gliding there was still a tremendous demand for cadets to fly, so in May 1949 a flying scholarship scheme was introduced, taking up to 250 cadets each year and training them to the standard of Private Pilot licence. There was also a scheme introduced to pay local flying clubs for cadet flights.

Unfortunately this was not too successful and it was abandoned after only 5 years. By 1957 it was decided that the Corps would have its own fleet of 50 Chipmunk aircraft, established in 13 Flights called Air Experience Flights and located at existing University Air Squadron bases. In 1996/97 the 12 AEFs were fully integrated into the UASs, and the flying task for both units was achieved using the Bulldog aircraft.





*De Havilland Chipmunk T10*



*Scottish Aviation Bulldog T1*

A new aircraft, the GROB 115E (Tutor), was introduced in 1999 for use at AEFs and UASs. It is this aircraft that today trains service pilots and cadets alike.



*GROB 115E Tutor*

In keeping with the spirit of the Royal Warrant, cadets were encouraged to participate in sports and to follow a variety of interests and pastimes. So it was that in 1956, 7 Squadrons of the ATC were asked to pioneer the recently introduced Duke of Edinburgh Scheme. Trevor Mason of No 85 (Southgate) Squadron was the first cadet to gain the Silver award and David Hood of No 1141 (6th Edinburgh) Squadron was the first to achieve Gold. The

experiment was an outstanding success and most welcomed by the vast majority of cadets. The scheme was opened to all squadrons in 1960 and the number of awards gained by cadets seems to grow each year. From April 1998 to March 1999 ATC cadets achieved a total of 255 Gold awards, 813 Silver awards and 1854 Bronze awards.

By 1960 many changes had taken place in the Air Cadet world. A review of training in this year saw a move away from academic study to a more general approach to aviation related subjects. The recently set up HQ Air Cadets took over the role of setting examinations from the RAF Central Examining Board, and ex-cadets no longer received any privileges on joining the RAF - they would have to do the same RAF training as any other entrant.

The 5th February 1962 was the 21st anniversary of the formation of the ATC. To mark the occasion the Corps was presented with its own Banner by His Royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Air Commodore-in-Chief of the ATC, who was appointed to this position on the death of His Majesty King George VI.



The Banner is only paraded on special occasions, being most frequently seen at Annual Wing Parades when the Commandant Air Training Corps is the reviewing officer. In 1979, after 17 years of regular use and 109 appearances, the Corps had to have a replacement Banner presented by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh as the old one was beginning to wear out. The old Banner is on display in the Central Church of the RAF, St Clement Danes, together with the Banner of the Royal Air Forces Association, the idea being that both old and future members of the Royal Air Force can be thought of together.

In 1967 a committee under Air Marshal Sir Douglas Morris RAF (Retd) was appointed to review the ATC and if necessary to re-organise and improve it. The Morris Report recommended many changes to the administration of the Corps and its training, bringing it to much the same position that we find it in today. Amongst other things the report recommended introducing a fourth stage of advanced training called Staff Cadet, and continuing the move away from academic training by introducing project training and adventure training as part of the official syllabus. This allowed cadets to pursue additional activities which would make use of their practical and technical skills. A further change to the Royal Warrant was made, which still holds today, stating - The aims of the Corps shall be:

**To promote and encourage among young people a practical interest in aviation and the Royal Air Force.**



**To provide training which will be useful both in the Services and in civilian life.**

**To foster the spirit of adventure, and to develop the qualities of leadership and good citizenship.**

In 1970 trials were undertaken with a Self-Launching Glider (SLG), the Scheibe Falke 25B built by Slingsby. The SLG is fitted with an engine and propeller so that it can taxi and take off just like a light aeroplane, but after reaching the correct height, the engine can be switched off, the propeller prevented from turning with a brake, and the machine allowed to glide as a normal glider. The idea proved to be very popular and after some modifications finally came into service in 1977 with the name Venture Mk2.



*Venture Mk 2*

On 3rd May 1974 Air Commodore Chamier died at the age of 91. He had created an organisation which had developed a life of its own, growing and changing over the years, and built around the young people of the day. He firmly believed that the future of the nation is in the hands of its youth, and the ATC continues as an embodiment of his ideals.

In 1980, the decision was made to allow girls to join the ATC in a limited number of squadrons on a trial basis over 2 years. Girls were to be fully integrated in the squadrons, wearing the same uniform and receiving the same training as the boys. They were to take part in all ATC activities and have the same opportunities for air experience flying and gliding, and where suitable facilities existed, they were allowed on camps. The girls took up the challenge of the ATC with relish. By 1981, girl cadets were flying solo in gliders, gaining marksman badges and taking an active part in the D of E Award. Cadet Fiona Brown of No 404 (Borough of Morpeth) Squadron being the first girl cadet in the Corps to gain a Gold D of E Award. The first woman to command an ATC squadron - No 2500 (St Neots) - was Flight Lieutenant Janet Page WRAFVR(T) who was appointed in 1982. By the end of March 1999, there were 8682 girl cadets in the Corps.

The 40th anniversary of the Corps was marked by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, Air Commodore-in-Chief presenting a special award in February 1981. The award called the Guinea Pig Prize is awarded in recognition of an outstanding individual performance. Both Flight Sergeant Simon Burrow of No 127 (Wakefield) Sqn and Cadet Daniel Norman of No 1013 (Quantock) Sqn received the award in 1982 for outstanding personal courage. Simon Burrow had to swim out to rescue a friend who had got into difficulties in a fast flowing tide. He had risked his own life to save another.

In 1982 approval was given to purchase modern gliders to replace the Sedberghs and Kirby Cadets. The aircraft chosen were the AS K21 (Vanguard) – a tandem 2 seater high performance glider, the AS W19 (Valiant) - a single seater version of the AS K21 and the Janus C - made from glass reinforced plastic (GRP). In 1984, a further 100 tandem seater gliders, the GRP Grob 103 (Viking) were also introduced as the major part of the total glider strength. It was not until 1989 that a new motorised Self-Launching Glider, the GRP Grob 109B, was announced as a replacement for the canvas clad Venture. This aircraft came into service in 1990 with the name Vigilant.



*GROB 103 Viking*



*GROB 109B Vigilant*

Over the years the ATC has grown to be perhaps the largest gliding organisation in the world and has taught many thousands of cadets to fly. In recognition of the magnificent job the Corps has done in bringing flying and gliding training to cadets, in 1985 HM The Queen presented the ATC with the Royal Aero Club's most prestigious award - The Royal Aero Club Diploma. At the beginning of 1999, the Corps had 15 winch launch and 13 self launch schools, with a total of 2801 glider training certificates awarded in the first 6 months of 1999. Microlight flying training has also recently been introduced.

A significant landmark in ATC history came in 1991 with the Corps' Golden Jubilee. The initial launch of the 50th Anniversary year took place on 31 January 1991 at the Southampton Hall of Aviation when the AOC Air Cadets, Air Commodore Skelley, received the Air League Challenge Cup from Mr Michael Cobham, chairman of the Air League. The cup was awarded to the Corps in recognition of the outstanding contribution made to British aviation over the past 50 years. A Service of Thanksgiving was held on 3rd February at the

Central Church of the RAF, St Clement Danes, in the presence of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

Throughout the year the whole Corps celebrated the occasion by organising special events. Squadrons had open evenings, held local Thanksgiving parades or undertook community related projects in an effort to show the nation the value of the work done by the cadets of the ATC.

Over seventy years from that germ of an idea, when Air Commodore Chamier gave the Corps 3 years to prove itself, the ATC found itself strong and active. It has changed considerably from those early days of training for entry into the RAF but it is still aimed at capturing the imagination and enthusiasm for aviation amongst our young people. The Corps will, through its range of many activities, continue to produce a setting for our youth to show its finest qualities.