

A composite image of three men in military uniforms. The man on the left is in a light blue uniform with a star medal. The man in the center is in a dark green uniform with a scarf and a peaked cap. The man on the right is in a dark green uniform with a 'ROYAL FLYING CORPS' patch. The title 'VOICES IN FLIGHT' is overlaid in large white serif font.

VOICES IN FLIGHT

CONVERSATIONS WITH AIR VETERANS
OF THE GREAT WAR



ANNA MALINOVSKA & MAURIEL JOSLYN

VOICES IN FLIGHT

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*Conversations with Air Veterans
of the Great War*

by

**Anna Malinovska &
Mauriel P. Joslyn**



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AVIATION

For Cynthia

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Without the encouragement, insight and meticulous attention to detail of our husbands, Martin and Rick, this book would not exist.

Introduction

But oon thing there is above all othr:
I gave him winges, wherwith he might vpflye
To honor and fame; and, if he would, farther
Then mortall thinges, above the starry sky;
Considering the pleasur that an iye
Myght geve in erthe by reason of his love,
What shuld that be that lasteth still above?

THOMAS WYATT (1503–1542)

The idea that evolved into a series of portraits of early aviators, eventually presented as hour-long interviews, was stimulated by my first visit to the RAF Museum at Hendon in 1976, where I encountered the collection of First World War aircraft – incredible structures, deprived of function, which had reverted to pure form. Aesthetic appreciation of these exquisite machines aside, I felt an intense curiosity about what it must have been like to fly them. What manner of men were their pilots, the pioneers?

I began research at both the Imperial War Museum and the library of the RAF Museum, and attempted to discover everything possible about early aviation. Having initially been unaware that so many RFC and RAF personnel were still extant, I considered interviewing Second World War rear gunners. There were fewer of these than anticipated, and those remaining were signally unwilling to speak of their experiences. As is sometimes the case when one becomes intensely focused on a particular subject, I

began to discover various people who either knew, or were related to, ex-RFC servicemen.

As there was naturally a time constraint on this project, the war having ended some sixty years before, I thought it best to expedite the venture. I borrowed video equipment almost as obsolete as the old planes themselves, and completed the first four interviews. I assumed that the subjects of the interviews would have clearer recall of events occurring sixty years before than of those in the nearer past; this proved correct. As this scheme seemed capable of development, I decided to furnish a comprehensive overview of service in all categories in the first air force, and I submitted a proposal to the RAF Museum that I should create an archive to be used for research by aviation historians, students and other interested parties. This was accepted by Mr J. M. Bruce who was, at that time, Keeper of Aircraft and Research Studies. To his depth of learning in this field, and enthusiasm for the project, I am eternally indebted.

I decided to approach potential interviewees with a written questionnaire to serve as a prompt in the interview. In the main they acceded most generously to my request to record their recollections, though a few were constrained by the frailty of increasing age or by poor health. The medium of video recording was chosen rather than that of film, with a view to minimizing disturbance of the subjects' home environment. Two clip-on spotlights were used, with a discreetly placed throat microphone attached to the RFC tie. On meeting, there would be preliminary reminiscence and the display of cherished photographs or documents while the equipment was being set up. The latter would often require some time to register a satisfactory image. The serious business of the interview would then commence, sometimes with perceptible nervousness and diffidence on the part of the veterans. Their apprehension usually dissipated as they relaxed into personal experiences of their service, recalling this with increasing confidence. The interview would usually conclude with fresh anecdotes and considerable hospitality and bonhomie.

An MOD moratorium halted funding for the project; consequently, I was able to complete a mere thirty-eight hours of interviews, and these only with British flying personnel. Owing to scandalous curatorial incompetence, this irreplaceable material was allowed to languish and atrophy for more than twenty-five years. Moreover, it proved impossible at the time to interest any publisher in the expansion of this material into print. Fortunately, though, with a new and more sympathetic appointment at Hendon, and with the interest of an accredited historian, this archive has been revitalized, and may now triumphantly assume the role for which it was originally designated – a living record for the RAF Museum, available to researchers of the first war in the air.

Some of the original interviewees have had perforce, and with great reluctance, to be omitted from this book. They are Cyril Britten, Humphrey De Verde Leigh, Leonard Edwards, George Etheridge, Reginald Greenfield, G. F. Hyams, A. R. Johnson, George Moore, 'Bunny' Sharman and Frederick Shildrick. Heartfelt thanks to all of you.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a most salient memorial to all the valiant and beloved men of the first aerial conflict, and to those remarkable chaps whom it was my enormous privilege to meet.

salvete vos omnes!

ANNA MALINOVSKA
London, August 2005

I first met Anna Malinovska in Victoria Station, over coffee and a conversation about Captain Albert Ball VC, in late 2003. Our brief acquaintance revealed an amazing endeavour undertaken by Anna, which resonated with me as a fascinating insight into the world of early aviation. Thus began a long association as we revisited her project of nearly thirty years ago, in order to transform these interviews into print.

I have always been fascinated by Albert Ball. His youth and untimely death prompted my lifelong interest in the First World War and in those first 'Knights of the Sky'. What began as a dedicated interest in Albert Ball for both of us has come to fruition because of him.

This book is the result of our efforts.

MAURIEL JOSLYN
Sparta, Georgia 2005

Sir Herbert Thompson

Sir Joseph Herbert Thompson, born on 9 March 1898 at Wilmslow, Cheshire, was the son of J. Arnold Thompson JP, and Ellen Stewart Fraser. He was educated at Manchester Grammar School and, after the war, graduated from Brasenose College, Oxford. Thompson served in the Royal Naval Air Service as a sub lieutenant in 1916 and was promoted to captain in the RAF in 1918. He became Assistant Master at Oundle School from 1921–22. He joined the Indian Civil Service in 1922 and served in the Madras Presidency. In 1925, he married Kathleen Rodir. They had three daughters. In 1926 Thompson was appointed to the Foreign & Political Department, Government of India. He became Deputy Secretary of the Political Department from 1941–43, Resident for Kolhapur and Deccan states 1944–45, and Resident for the Punjab states 1945–47. He was knighted in 1947.

Thompson retired in 1949, but remained active as General Secretary to the London Council of Social Service 1949–50, Diocesan Secretary, Worcester 1951–1953, and Rowing Correspondent for the *Sunday Times* from 1954–68. He held office at the BBC Appointments Department from 1956–59. Sir Herbert was interviewed at his home at Fair Acre, Haddenham, Buckinghamshire on 19 and 29 May 1977. He died on 28 March 1984.

I wanted to get into the Navy when the war broke out. You couldn't get in early unless you 'fudged' your age, but you *could* get into the Royal Naval Air Service. I met, under my father's aegis,

the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. He said to my father, 'Are you going to let him join the Navy?' Father wrote, and I got a recommendation from Winston Churchill. Strangely enough, they accepted me!

The Navy was *gloriously* conservative in those days; they wouldn't have anyone as a pilot unless he was a commissioned officer. I had to wait until I was eighteen. Naturally, I thought I was going to be flying seaplanes, but at Cranwell, which afforded a very good training, they took much better care of you than those poor RFC chaps with all their casualties in France. We started on Maurice Farmans, then Curtisses, then Avros, then BE2cs, and finally the Scout flight, on which you couldn't be instructed. You were sent straight up into the air, and that was your first solo flight. The first Sopwith I ever flew was a 1½-strutter, and I came down and said to the flight commander, 'I want to change and be a fighter pilot instead of flying seaplanes.'

He replied, 'If you want to break your bloody neck, I won't stand in your way.'

So that's how I became a fighter pilot. The reason the RNAS was so good, is that Churchill went into private enterprise, and we had Shorts, Bristols, de Havillands, Handley Pages, and above all, Sopwiths. The RFC and the Army went into the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough, and built up all these other ones, but I don't think they were as good. They were all labelled. An RE was 'Research Experimental', an SE was 'Scouting Experimental' and an FE was 'Fighter Experimental'.

I found flying really exciting, and was a natural airman. Once, though, I was coming down in a Camel and I didn't know that I'd been 'Archied' badly. One of my wheels had been blown off. Of course, you can't see your wheels, so I started to land in the usual way. I didn't know what people were playing at on the ground; apparently they were waving *wheels* at me. Anyway, I made the most perfect landing of my whole career. I came down like a feather on one wheel, but I couldn't understand why the plane suddenly slewed and stood up on her nose. Luckily, nothing was broken, and I flew her again the next morning. The CO came up and I said: 'I'm *awfully* sorry.'

He said: 'Didn't you know you'd lost a wheel?' Thereafter he considered me the most perfect pilot he'd ever known!

We got on marvellously with the RFC. They envied us because we took with us the whole of the prestige of the Navy. When I was at Eastchurch we had a CO who was alleged to have been shot on the beach at Jutland. He was frightfully keen on discipline. He summoned all the instructors to line up and said: 'If you'd been properly educated at Osborne and Dartmouth, you'd know how to behave.' I wondered what on earth was going to happen. He said: 'One of you flew low over a farmhouse and caused a cow to abort!' I was certainly the young man in question, as I was the only fighter pilot there. There were boys there who did all sorts of things that they ought not to have done, and they loved it. I taught them one thing . . . when they'd lost their way, to fly alongside a railway station and read the name off. There was the Maidstone Express, and when I saw it I used to fly alongside it. We were only flying BE2es, which were quite slow, and you could keep up exactly with the train. You had the whole train waving out of the window at you. The boys loved it.

It's quite easy to fly between trees, too, after you've done it the first time. With the first two you go through, you think you're going to hit *both* of them, but afterwards, you realize that your eyesight has exaggerated their proximity. I've never hit a tree. One time when I was instructing, I went up in a Maurice Farman, and immediately afterwards in a triplane, and I could judge exactly where my wheels were when I came down, without seeing them. It's like trying to drive a motor car so that your wheels are aligned exactly with the kerbstone. The idea is that you stall at the identical moment when your wheels hit the ground. That is a perfect landing.

When I went out with Naval 8, I was flying Nieuports. I went out to No. 11 Squadron, which was forming at the time. It never did form, I don't think; we had so many casualties. We had five squadrons flying for the RFC; No. 8 was the first, then No. 1, No. 10, No. 9, and one other. One morning they said to me: 'There's a car coming to take you down to No. 8 Squadron.' I was a replacement for a casualty they'd had the night before. This was in the early

stages, so I was considered to be a Founder Member. They'd just got the Sopwith Triplane, which I'd never flown before. Previously, I'd flown Pups; we had a Pup in No. 11, and I flew my first solo in a Pup. She was an adorable little thing. Like all the great Sopwiths, she was really a glider with an engine in it, and she'd float for ever. The first time I ever took one up, the engine completely blotted out and I had to make a forced landing. I've no idea how long she floated. I chose my field and found that I was going to overshoot it; she floated across that field and she wouldn't come down. We ended up beautifully with the propeller just touching the edge of the end of the next field. She was a sweet thing. Call it sentiment, but in No. 8 Squadron we always gave our planes feminine names; always 'she', never 'it'. I've flown other people's aeroplanes when mine was in dock, but as long as I had 'Joan', I wouldn't want to think of anyone else flying her; I would have been frightfully jealous.

The ground crews were absolutely marvellous then, partly owing, I must say, to the leadership of our CO, who was a man called Geoffrey Bromet. He's still alive, and must be about eighty-five now. Curiously he gave up flying. I don't think he liked flight, but he was a very good CO. He was going a long way in his career, but unfortunately his wife had a row with the lady whose husband was Vaughn Lee, the head of the Air Service. I'm told that she was very difficult, and had sacked more Air Vice Marshals than anybody had ever known! This was just before the war. When the war broke out, Bromet came back again, but he could never rise above Air Vice Marshal. They did give him a job which he did extremely well. He ran the Azores and got a Knighthood out of it, but he was still Air Vice Marshal.

We did an awful lot with No. 16 Squadron, escorting them over the lines and so on, and they were dead meat with Richthofen and those people. Richthofen always waited for a sitting duck. He used to attack a lot of two-seaters; he thought them very important, as they were reconnaissance machines. They were dead meat, the poor devils.

Our machines were very slow. At the beginning of the Battle of Arras they had BE2es, which didn't have ring-mounting for the

observer. With the BE2e, you could only take a shot if a German got in your way. You chose your combat. With a fighter, his only protection was aggression, so if you were any good, you only got attacked if you wanted to be attacked, unless you got into a fight. If I knew I was going to get into a fight, I found that I always opened fire too soon, but the great thing is that once your guns started, you felt comforted. Once, though, when I had a German in my sights, and he didn't see me, and I had him cold . . . both guns jammed! I put them on both together; one jammed after only one shot, and the other after two.

We occasionally used Buckingham incendiary bullets in Naval 8. It was against the Hague Convention, but we used them, theoretically, against kite-balloons only. They weren't loaded unless someone decided he wanted to have a go at a kite-balloon. We used to load the tracer bullets one-in-two, one-in-three and one-in-four, as far as I can remember. It was a nuisance, though, because you'd follow the trajectory of the tracer instead of looking where you were aiming. You were liable to be shot down from the ground. We had no protection, just a basket chair to sit in. It was quite frightening flying over the Germans and seeing them firing up at you. You'd tingle all over; nobody wants to be shot in the bottom!

With the Camel, we had twin Vickers and we used automatically to fire both at once. The Vickers was designed for shooting on the ground. It was water-cooled. But what they did with ours was to cut louvres into the water-jacket, so it wasn't water-cooled; the air cooled the gun down. Then there was the problem with mass production of cartridges. They used to disintegrate, and then the load might not be exactly dead accurate, and you could shoot your propeller. The interrupter gear was designed to interrupt when the propeller was in front of it, but if the ammunition was just slightly under loaded, you might shoot the next blade. We were allowed five bullet holes per blade!

The jams in the air were a problem, though; we didn't have a machine which was designed for firing in the air. One of the things we learned was to have no oil in the gun, because oil froze at altitude, and this was no good for the gun. It was quite difficult to operate the controls in such extremely cold conditions. You saw

the button that you were supposed to be pressing, and you saw your hand doing it, but you couldn't feel it. It was sort of an automatic response. Your feet were like blocks of ice and, when you came down, the temperature changed so quickly, that they would be in agony. But you were young; it didn't matter.

From time to time, I used to fly up to the Sopwith Triplane ceiling just for the exhilaration of doing so. On one occasion, someone had managed to discover that a German photographer was coming over. I was sent out to stay up, petrol permitting, to look out for him. It was absolutely gorgeous. I went up to 23,000 feet and nobody could reach me. I was probably the highest person in the world at that moment. Of course, only triplanes could have done it. I remember looking at this beautiful, blue sky, and singing. I didn't want to come down; I could have stayed up there forever. It was perfectly safe.

The moment you got up in the clouds, with no artificial horizon, you didn't know where you were flying. I always remember the first time I got up in the clouds, the airspeed went up, and so I pulled the stick back to stop it, and it went up faster. I realized that what I'd been told would happen, had happened; I was on one wing or something like that.

When I was instructing, I had some fun with the youngsters and made them pretend to land on the top of a cumulus cloud, knowing that, down below, whatever happened, you'd come out of it. But if you got into a spin and the clouds were below 3,000 feet, you might not get out of the spin in time. I've always thought that doing a loop was a marvellous thing. Your first ever loop just happened; you were stationary and it was the earth that went round you. It's unbelievable. On your second loop, you knew just what to do, but your first came as quite a surprise. The instructors didn't like you looping, though, because you could pull the machine to pieces and pull the wings off. It happened to a member of our squadron. I saw the wreckage when it came back, and I picked a piece of vertebra off the back of the engine. All the wings had disappeared. You had only one set of flying wires, and if one of them went, all three would go straightaway. That's why we were fairly careful, and that's why you'd never spin a triplane.

When people were killed or disappeared, you just had to carry on. In the mess at night, the usual thing was to get drunk. In those days, I was practically a teetotaler, but we had four Canadians in the squadron at one time, and the Canadians were quite different; they would get drunk at any moment. How they managed it, I don't know. There was this fellow I shared a tent with, a man named Thornely, whose father was the Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. One day, the clouds were very low and he went up to 5,000 feet after having had a glass of port for lunch. He never usually drank if he was going up, and most people didn't, but he said: 'D'you know, when I got up to 5,000 feet, I was as tight as a Lord.'

Portal was jolly careful about his men, without actually ordering them about. I remember we had a 'blind' one night, and he had a gorgeous brew of mulled claret with all sorts of stuff poured in and he was stirring this, and years later I came to realize that what he had done was to boil away all the worst parts, so that people thought they were being he-men, but they weren't at all! It was quite innocuous.

We didn't go into town for the nightlife; it was too far away. You could only go if you had a tender, and being a small squadron with only fifteen pilots, we didn't have an awful lot of transport. But the CO was quite good. If it was a really bad day, he'd say you could take a tender and go down to Amiens, but you couldn't stay the night, because there was no way of getting home. They used to go down to the village, though. One thing about the RNAS was that they were terribly 'Navy'. They flew the White Ensign, had a ship's bell, *esprit de corps* and so on, and as officer of the Watch, your duty was to line up the 'Liberty Boat' and dismiss it to go down the road to the estaminet! The Army loved us, because we had all these Naval gadgets. It was fun being something different.

I knew Albert Ball by reputation, but I never met him. We'd hear news that Ball had brought down another machine, and Little would want to get straight up in an aeroplane. He'd got an eye like an eagle. You'd usually have two or three chaps in a squadron who could spot another plane in the air more quickly than anyone else. Booker was like that; he'd always beat me at spotting. I flew a lot

with Booker, and I loved him. He saved me once when I was set on by the whole of the Flying Circus. I was enjoying myself enormously, shooting a German down, and I didn't realize that the rest of his squadron was up above. They all descended on me at once. Suddenly, I was shot into from behind. We concluded that it was Richthofen's brother, because Richthofen himself happened to be on leave. He had pennons on his wingtips and so on. The triplane had only one gun, which was a 'propelled' gun. It fired off the gun when it thought the propeller wouldn't be in the way, so it went 'pop . . . pop . . . pop . . . ' All he got onto me was one shot slap through the main spar of my top plane. When I came to, I saw that wood was coming out of it. He had shot through the aileron balance wires, and all I could do was to chase the thing down. I managed to get home. I landed, and she just collapsed. All six ailerons fell on the floor, and then she just sat down.

Later, I met Mannock, too, when Booker and I between us shot Waldhausen down. Mannock lied completely and said that he'd got up just as Waldhausen was coming down with a damaged engine. He said he'd shot him down, and filed a covert report claiming that he'd brought him down completely alone. I got back and had been told to write a combat report, which was presumably destroyed when Booker got back and filed his combat report. There was a delay and Mannock got in first. Booker was furious, spitting blood; he knew he'd got in the first shot. If he hadn't hit Waldhausen in the engine, he would have escaped over the lines. We were both in an awful hurry to stop him going back over the lines. We'd come down absolutely flat out from about 12,000 feet, and one had a sense of just how well made the Camel was. I was absolutely vertical!

Fifty years after the war, I met Waldhausen. He came out with the idea that we were the last of the Knights Errant. I felt that we *were*. You never saw anybody you killed. You were awfully protected in that way. You slept in a bed. We were very young and very gay, and we did a lot of lunatic things!

After the war ended, there was a place waiting for me at Oxford University, which was a bit of a soft landing, really. Some people couldn't adjust when they left; they couldn't get down to books

again. Some people were impatient, but I was eager to learn, and knew that you had to get a good degree, otherwise you wouldn't get a job. It was such a change coming back from a front-line squadron with all the fighting and the combats, but among the youth of the flying squadron it was rather like being an undergraduate. We were gay and light-hearted, and there wasn't really a hatred of the Hun. It was like having an enemy on a game board; you respected him if he was good. We didn't like Richthofen, but we admired Voss enormously.

We were frightened of the Flying Circus because we knew they were good, but they did make the mistake of putting all their cream into the one squadron. We, on the other hand, had one ace in each squadron, who raised the morale of the whole squadron. When you damaged one of them, you were trying to destroy the plane, not the chap, and I remember the one I shot down, Waldhausen, telling me that he was horrified when he saw the dead bodies that he'd caused himself. But we didn't have to. We were delighted and frightfully excited when their planes crashed, because that was another victory and another machine destroyed.

Quite truthfully, I think we were awfully patriotic in that war. We didn't dwell on the evils of war; it was a game to us. We admired the trenches. The spirit in the trenches was superb. We used sometimes to nip up to the front line and have a look at it, but they soon put a stop to that, as we were far too expensive to get killed in the trenches.

I think the war certainly caused a move toward abolishing class distinctions. True, there were officers and men, but the privileges had gone. These days, you don't really take any notice of a chap with a title. Then there's the political side. There was no Labour Party when we went into the war, but afterwards, the polarization in politics changed enormously.

The older I get, and the more of a museum piece I become, the prouder I am to have flown in those days.

Note: Mannock submitted no claim for bringing down *Oberleutnant* Hans Waldhausen, contrary to Thompson's account. The sequence of events is as follows: On 27 September 1917, Waldhausen attacked a

balloon of No. 20 KBS at Aix-Noulette and ignited it. Three Nieuports from No. 40 Squadron, including Mannock and Tudhope, ascended to intercept the Albatros. Mannock suffered engine trouble and was unable to keep up. Waldhausen was then attacked by an RE8, which he shot down into Farbus Wood. He abandoned his attack on the balloon and flew to Ablain-St-Nazaire, where he successfully fired a balloon of No. 37 KBS. Here, he was attacked by Tudhope. As the latter disengaged after firing a long burst into the Albatros, the attack was joined by Booker and Thompson. Booker's engine was crippled by ground fire, forcing him down; he lost the Camel's wheels in a shell crater upon landing. He was met by Mannock, who had landed close by to assist him. The victory was shared between No. 40 RFC and No. 8 RNAS. Mannock arrived on foot at the Albatros, which had come down near Souchez, in time to save the wounded Waldhausen from harm at the hands of angry soldiers from a Canadian ammunition detail. The German pilot was relieved of all potential souvenirs, and taken prisoner. MPJ

Sir Herbert – the title 'came with the job' – was hardly the 'museum piece' he claimed to be. Aged seventy-nine at the time of the interview (the first of the series) he was a man of youthful appearance and boundless energy. This was expended on gardening, his great-grandchildren, and an abiding interest in Church architecture. After lunch a most informative tour of Haddenham Parish Church was supplied. He held the post of Churchwarden, and was author of the guide to the building. He was an ardent cyclist, using a machine as light and portable as was his favourite triplane, *Joan*.

On the drive from Stoke Mandeville station to his home, the lingering effect of his years as a scout pilot was evident in his swift and accurate handling of the car, and in the constant rotation of his head, as though he was still scanning for hostile aircraft in the skies of Buckinghamshire.

Lieutenant Leslie Latham

Lieutenant Leslie Sawyer Latham was born in Manchester on 22 May 1898. He attended Manchester Grammar School from September 1910 until Christmas 1916. He was interviewed on 25 November 1978, and died in Solihull on 5 April 1982.

I joined the RFC in early 1917. I had left Manchester Grammar School at Christmas the previous year, and joined the Artists' Rifles at Gidea Park in Romford. It was one of the two Officer Cadet Units in the country at the time. When I went in, I had no intention of flying. Owing to a certain ability in mathematics, I opted for a commission in the artillery, and had several interviews by officers from the War Office. At the beginning of February, we were called in and told that all special commissions, such as Artillery, Engineers and Army Service Corps, had been washed out, and that the only commissions available were in the Infantry and the Royal Flying Corps. All those chaps who'd been waiting for the Flying Corps were delighted! I opted for the Infantry. When I got back to my hut and found that the other chaps I'd been knocking around with had all plumped for the Flying Corps, I thought, 'Well, I might as well stay with them as long as possible.' I went back to the Orderly Room and asked if I could change my option. Fortunately, the Company Commander agreed. We were formed into a squad, and sent on a three-week map-reading course. After a day's march to Rainham, to shoot at the rifle range, we got back home to Gidea

Park in a snowstorm, and were ordered to get our kit all packed, as we were leaving the next morning.

We went to Reading, and became the first batch of cadets in the Royal Flying Corps. Hitherto all the trainee pilots had been officers seconded from other regiments, usually after service in France. Fifty-six of us from the Artists' Rifles arrived on the Saturday; this was followed by a similar batch from the Inns of Court OTC the following week. We were billeted in St Patrick's Hall at the University College of Reading, then proceeded with our course which consisted of lectures on aviation, different types of engine, rigging and general aeronautics. One of the instructors there was C.R. Fleming Williams, one of the early pioneers of flying. He was always known for his talk about the joys of flying, and used to say:

Flying's a wonderful game. You sit up there with your engine purring, and you look down at a ploughed field, and think how industrious the farmer's been. A bit further on, you see a field of waving corn, and you think about the bounties of Mother Nature. Further on still, there's a big wood, with all colours of green. Then a lake, and you think 'How cool that would be'.

Flying's a wonderful game, while your engine's running all right. At the first flutter, you look down and you see that ploughed field, and curse that farmer for having ploughed it, because you know if you don't land very carefully on that you're going to go back over top. You also know that if you land on that field of grain you've got to pancake, otherwise, again, you're going to do a somersault. It's not so nice landing on a tree! And even water can be hard if you don't pancake onto it. So, flying's a wonderful game while your engine's going all right!

Just before Easter, we finished the course and they started to post the cadets. Of course, we'd been kitted out with a special uniform with a white headband. And we were told that on no account were we to take that white band off while we were on leave, as we were still cadets. They started posting: A down to about K, then they went to the bottom of the list and started posting upwards,

from Y to N. That left six of us: Ls and Ms. We were posted to Tadcaster. We were the first six pupils in a new squadron, No. 68 RS, and upon our arrival there wasn't even a plane for us! That afternoon, the flight commander, Captain A.T. Lloyd, went to fetch a Maurice Farman Shorthorn.

Our instructor was the CO of the squadron, Major L. Dawes. He was a rather disgruntled person, as he'd taken the first DH1 squadron over to France, and half of them were said to have fallen into the Channel! He always carried a hunting crop with him. We pupils had to wear a crash helmet similar to those used by motorcyclists today. The pupil sat out on the front with the instructor behind. And very often when a plane was coming in, with its engine shut off, you'd suddenly hear 'Thud! Thud! Thud!' When you looked up you could see Major Dawes thumping the pupil on the head with his hunting crop, very often accompanied by the words, 'Put the bloody *nose* down!'

We only had to do two hours on Shorthorns, but because we were short of machines our progress was quite slow. By the time I was due for my solo, it was 5 June! It was just after 5 o'clock in the morning. The Shorthorn was a very difficult plane to taxi for the simple reason that it had twin rudders, mounted on skids. But the skids were not integral with the rudder; they were quite free to move. So if you were moving along and you put right rudder on, it didn't follow that the plane would immediately turn to the right, unless you put a burst of engine on to give it that extra air on the rudder. After my two hours' solo had been completed, I was transferred to No. 46 Squadron at Tadcaster, where we had DH1s, FE2bs and FE2ds.

I completed my tour on 7 July with just over twenty-three hours' flying, was granted my wings and left two days later. I was posted to No. 77 HD Squadron, with flights at Turnhouse, near the Forth Bridge; Penston, near Huntingdon; and Whiteburn, on the Lammermuirs. We had BE2es, BE2cs, an RE8 and some BE12s. The BE2c was the most beautifully rigged machine I flew in all my service. You could open up your throttle and once you got flying speed, as long as you kept your rudder right, you could take off with just a slight touch on the stick. Once it was off the ground it

would take its own flying speed for climbing and when you got to the height you wanted, and eased your throttle back, it would straighten up and drop to the right speed. Of course, there were only one or two select people at that time allowed to fly it; but later, I flew it quite a number of times.

At the beginning of 1918, I was transferred back to Penston. By that time, my old flight commander had gone overseas, and we had a new flight commander, a Dutch South African named Van Eisen. His idea of getting his third pip was to make everybody fly! If he saw a pilot hanging around, he'd say, 'What are you doing on the bloody ground!? Get into the air, you young so-and-so!' We thought he was a bit of a 'nigger-driver' at times, but he contributed substantially to the Home Defence. In February, I was sent down to North Weald, near Epping, with No. 39 Home Defence Squadron. They had just been issued with Bristol Fighters, and were getting rid of all their surplus planes. From there, I was posted to No. 36 Squadron in Newcastle, where they had FE2bs and FE2ds. I travelled down late one evening, went to Squadron HQ, and stayed there overnight. At breakfast next morning, a phone call came through from the aircraft park at Gosforth, where they built Armstrong Whitworth machines. The CO there was asking our CO for pilots, so I was shipped up to the aircraft park. The chief test pilot there took me up in an Armstrong Whitworth, an FK8. Those machines were like canal barges to fly! They were so sluggish, and very heavy on the controls. If you felt a bump coming, you'd put some rudder on to counteract it, and the rudder acted about a couple of minutes later! They were especially difficult to fly in bad weather. Mostly, they were used for artillery observation in France. They had a 160-horsepower Beardmore engine, and one of their characteristic features was an adjustable tail plane. I was detailed to fly an FK8 down to Lakedown on Salisbury Plain. It was looking pretty dark when we took off, and before we got down, snow started to fall. We got a very bad bump on landing. The following day, I flew to London, and from there, up to Newcastle. There, apart from flying ourselves, we were training observers for night bombing. I'd already done some night flying with No. 77 Squadron. Night flying is, of course, very

different from flying in daylight; you've got to trust your instruments. But even in wartime, with not many lights, it's remarkable what you can see compared with what you expect to see. The first time I did a night landing had been at Whiteburn, with about a foot of snow on the ground. The moon was shining brightly, and the shadow of the plane on the snow was visible from 1,000 feet.

The idea of putting in as many hours flying as possible had seized No. 36 Squadron as much as it had at No. 77. So we were flying around very often, just putting in hours, doing very little except flying, and a few days after I got up there I said to the observer, 'Get a Very gun, and a few Very cartridges.' He did, and we went up to Berwick where I had a number of friends from my Whiteburn days. We flew around Berwick, and the observer fired off the Very lights. The next morning I had a postcard which said it had been officially announced in the local school that afternoon, that the lights flying from our machine were to congratulate the people of Berwick on their magnificent effort in connection with the Victory Bonds!

A couple of days later, I was flying around with another observer, a Welshman called Evans. Coming home from a flight, I said to him, 'Would you like a stall?'

He replied, 'Oh, yes, sir!'

I pulled her up into a stall, and of course even when you're strapped in, and you suddenly go down from a stall into a dive, it's a bit of a thrill, but when you've only got a piece of 3-ply round you, with a steel tube to keep that in place, it's even more of a thrill. The minute I pulled out of it, he turned round and put his thumb up and was grinning over, so I gave him another one. The next thing was I did an Immelmann turn, in which, almost coming into the stall, you stop, kick over the rudder, and come back in the opposite direction from which you were originally flying. We did two of those, and then I thought, 'Well, I've got to get him somehow.' I said, 'Hold on; we'll try a spin!' It so happened that I'd never tried it myself before because I'd never had the chance to try it in training! Anyway, I put it into a spin, which fortunately was successful! We did a second one, and then came home. I went into the hangar to fill out the flight sheets, but Taffy couldn't wait.