

Newsweek

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Eagles to War

RAF's All-American Squadron Joins British in Heavy Raids



Many Americans are serving both with the British and Canadian Air Forces, but the RAF's Eagle Squadron is the only unit which is all-American save for the British squadron leader who succeeded William Erwin Gibson Taylor, a New Yorker, released to rejoin United States naval aviation. Britain's flying Yanks wear the regular RAF sky blue uniform with their own eagle insignia and initials ES, but don't have to swear allegiance to the King. The squadron, formed last October, joined the Fighting Command in March.

The RAF's big offensive against the German-occupied Continent has given the Americans their first taste of action beyond the Channel. The first raid in which they participated was on July 2, when the squadron accompanied other RAF units which escorted bombers raiding an air-drome at Lille, France. High explosives were crashing on the target when Messerschmitt 109 fighters roared at the bombers and the fighter guard. Usually the Air Ministry doesn't let names out, but it did allow it to be said that "the youngest" Eagle broke up a Nazi attack and shot down a Messerschmitt. Gregory Augustus Daymond of Los Angeles, Calif., who wears a scraggly mustache to look more than his 20 years, was the youngest on the last published roster.

The squadron accounted for two more planes, one shot down by an American and one by the British squadron leader, out of a total of eighteen claimed by the British that day. The British admitted the loss of eight fighters and two bombers. The

RAF's All-American Squadron

In the raid on July 2, one member of the squadron, William Isaac Hall, 25, of Springfield, Vt., failed to return. He last was seen gliding down toward French soil, making it probable that he had landed safely and been taken prisoner. Four other members, Philip Leckrone of Salem, Ill., Edwin Orbison of Sacramento, Calif., Stanley Michel Kolendorski of Lakehurst, N.J., and Vernon Keogh of Brooklyn, N.Y. had previously been killed, and on June 22 Nathaniel Maranz of New York City was reported missing.

On July 4, Air Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair unveiled a tablet in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral to William Mead Lindsley Fiske III, first American RAF officer killed in action. Fiske, a noted bob-sled racer, was killed on Aug. 18, 1940, during the Battle of Britain. Harry A. Womack Jr. of Johnson City, Tenn., who also was an RAF pilot not in the Eagle Squadron, was killed on July 1 in an accident.

Bombs

The RAF itself kept up the offensive with some of its hardest hitting to date. German bases in France were attacked by a British air armada so big it took twenty minutes to fly over an English coast town. Then the RAF followed up two fierce night raids on Bremen with daytime blastings of the port by Coastal Command Blenheims. Oldenburg, German rail center, and Borkum, seaplane base, also were bombed by day.

During all the raids over France the British encountered much stiffer opposition than they had met at any time in recent weeks, indicating that the attacks possibly had forced Hitler to bring back some of the Luftwaffe from the Russian front. The British offensive was costly in planes. The German High Command communiqués claimed 116 planes had been brought down against only five Nazi losses. These German air reports have generally proved exaggerated throughout the war, and the British figures were far different. However, their own figures for the week did add up to a greater loss for themselves than for the Germans by 72 planes to 68.

The Luftwaffe's raids over Britain continued to fall far short of blitz proportions, but explosives and incendiaries were dropped in small night raids over the Midlands, Wales, and the southwest coast of England.