



Scots who made their mark in..... The Armed Forces



Hugh Dowding, 1st Baron Dowding

Moffat born Hugh Dowding a fighter pilot with the Royal Flying Corps during The Great War rose to become Air Officer Commanding Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain in which capacity he was commemorated in the 1986 History of the RAF set shown right.

Born in 1882, Dowding was educated at St Ninian's Preparatory School in Moffat—his father being one of the school's founders—before attending Winchester College in Hampshire. After training at Sandhurst (shown in the background of this 1999 Guernsey stamp for Earl Haig) he was commissioned 2nd Lieut at the age of



18. Then in the course of four years he served in several Empire outposts, e.g. Gibraltar, Ceylon, Hong Kong, India and



on making the rank of Captain in the Autumn of 1913 he expressed an interest in aviation so learned to fly in a Vickers biplane (similar to the one shown in this GB 1969 issue, a slightly later Vickers Vimy)

at Brooklands. A year later in August 1914 Dowding joined the Royal Flying Corps as a pilot with No 7 Squadron.



At the outbreak of war he served with a number of squadrons in France becoming C.O. of no 16 Squadron in July 15. He stood up to and clashed with the RFC commander, General Hugh Trenchard (GB 1986) regarding pilot fatigue, an important factor in pilot loss.

For the rest of the war Dowding was mainly involved in the organisation of pilot training in various locations both in England and France and was regularly promoted becoming a temporary brigadier-general in the Summer of 1917. Within a few months of the end of the war he was honoured by the King as K.C.M.G.



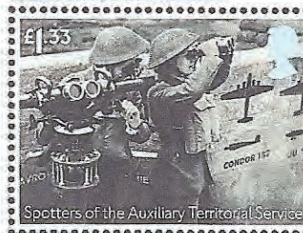
Later in 1919 he was made Group Captain and organised flying displays at Hendon in 1920 and 1921: this stamp in the 2008 Air Displays issue shows an aircraft rounding a beacon at Hendon, some years earlier.

Dowding was Appointed Air Commodore at the start of 1922, and from 1924 served as Chief Staff Officer for RAF Iraq Command—an inter-service remit whilst Britain held the Mandate of Mesopotamia. After WW1 The RAF policed the British Empire from the air and after an insurgency broke out in May 1920, British forces were sent from Egypt to restore order. (Does this sound familiar?)

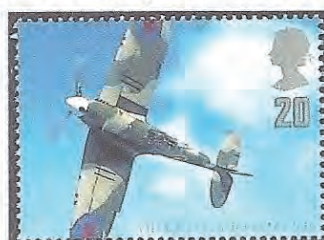


In the Spring of 1936 Dowding became Director of Training at the Air Ministry and such was his stock that at the start of 1928 he was made C.B. After a further spell in the Middle-East he was given very senior responsibilities for the defence of his country, promoted Air Marshal in January 1933 and K.C.B. later that Summer.

In 1936 as C.O. of RAF Fighter Command he developed what was to be known as "The Dowding System", organised from RAF Bentley Priory near London and comprising Radar (GB 1991), observers (Battle of Britain MS 2015) raid plotting (Military Uniforms 2008) and radio control of aircraft (Battle of Britain MS 2015).



Of vital importance, well before war broke out Dowding introduced into service the Spitfire (British Aircraft Designers 1997, Design Classics 2009) and Hurricane (RAF History 1986, top of column), both which carried bullet proof windshields.



The Battle of Britain

At the start of January 1937 Dowding became Air Chief Marshal, in which uniform he is shown on the Hurricane stamp (left) and at the end of the month G.C.V.O. (Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order).



Though due to retire in June 1939 (when he would have been 57) he was asked to remain in post because of the critical situation and did so until late November 1940 becoming heavily involved in organising air cover for the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk. (Britain Alone 2010).

During the Battle of Britain, the integrated organisation of aerial forces he had set up in advance proved vital and he was able to take a backroom role, marshalling resources and cover, leaving the strategy and tactics of combat to younger senior officers. (GB 1965 and 2015)



In the early part of his career Dowding had been regarded as aloof and arrogant (possibly because of his privileged background) but during 1940 he gained the nickname "Stuff", being difficult to persuade that the sacrifice of resources for merely possible gains was the right course of action and latterly he was appreciated for his sincerity and modesty. Because of his preparation in advance and backroom conduct Dowding is given credit for victory over the Luftwaffe.

The bottom right stamp in the 2015 MS shows some of Dowding's "chicks" and "dear fighter boys" in which cadre served his son Derek (1919-92), the 2nd Baron Dowding.



However, there was also extensive criticism of Dowding's strategies for other aspects of countering the German attacks, for example in their blitzkrieg on British cities with which the RAF could not adequately deal, particularly as airborne radar was not yet available. When Dowding did not show willingness to adopt all of the recommendations of the Salmond review into air defence policies Churchill decided his time in charge was up.

Further honoured as G.C.B. (Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath) Dowding was then dispatched to the US to oversee the procurement of new hardware, but here some of his natural aloofness and candour caused diplomatic difficulties.

In his retirement Dowding wrote five books *Many Mansions* (1943), *Lynchgate* (1945), *Twelve Legions of Angels* (1946), *God's Magic* (1946) and *The Dark Star* (1951). His biography *Twelve Legions of Angels* was ready earlier but containing much detail of possible enemy interest it was not published until 1946.

In June 1943 Dowding was honoured with an Hereditary Peerage, styling him Baron Dowding of Bentley Priory.

Once permanently retired but still only his early 60's he became increasingly bitter about how he had been treated by the RAF Big Wigs and the government considering how the Battle of Britain had saved the country from an almost certain German defeat.

Rather like Conan-Doyle, in his closing years Dowding became interested in spiritualism and fairies (which he thought helped plants to grow) and wrote books about it (as above). He became a Theosophist and claimed to have "met" lost pilots in his sleep on runways made of light. In the House of Lords he championed the vegetarian cause and the humane slaughtering of animals for food.

Two years before his death Dowding met Laurence Olivier who was playing him in the 1969 film *Battle of Britain* (Sierra Leone 1990) and when Olivier gushingly said he felt he was rather making a mess of portraying his hero, Dowding candidly agreed !!

He died aged 88 and is memorialised in Westminster Abbey.



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