

# **Concise History of The Royal Air Force 1918 to 2025**

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## **1. The Early Days: 1918-1945**

The Royal Air Force formed on **1 April 1918**, during World War I. Initially created by merging the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service.

The 'new' RAF was the most powerful air force in the world with more than 290,000 personnel and nearly 23,000 aircraft. [Our history | Royal Air Force](#)

By **1 August 1919** the RAF had been reduced in strength to 35,500. [History of the Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)

### **World War I**

Upon the outbreak of World War I, the RFC, possessing 179 airplanes and 1,244 officers and men, sent an aircraft park and four squadrons to France on **August 13, 1914**.

The strength of the RAF in **November 1918** was nearly 291,000 officers and airmen. It possessed 200 operational squadrons and nearly the same number of training squadrons, a total of 22,647 aircraft. [Royal Air Force \(RAF\) | Facts, History, & Aircraft | Britannica](#)

### **WW1: RAF Losses**

The casualty rate was very high: 14,166, of whom around 9000 died or were missing in action. A further estimated 8,000 were killed in training accidents. [100 years of the Royal Air Force – The Historic England Blog](#)

### **Formation of the Royal Air Force: 1 April 1918**

On **1 April 1918** the [Royal Flying Corps](#) (formed **1912**) and the [Royal Naval Air Service](#) (formed in **1914**) were combined to create the Royal Air Force. This made the RAF the world's first independent air force. [Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)

### **RAF Coastal Area: 15 September 1919 to 14 July 1936**

After the RAF formed in **1918**, maritime air operations were initially handled by No. 10 Group, which was then absorbed into the Northern Area.

In **15 September 1919**, the Coastal Area was established as the dedicated maritime force for the new Air Ministry, taking over functions from that absorbed unit.

It was to act as the RAF's premier maritime arm until it was replaced by [RAF Coastal Command](#) on **14 July 1936**. [RAF Coastal Area - Wikipedia](#)

### **RAF Rank Titles: 4 August 1919**

The present rank titles of the RAF were introduced by Air Ministry Order on **4 August 1919**.

### **The Fleet Air Arm: 1 April 1924**

The Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Air Force was formed **1 April 1924** under the control of the Air Ministry. It consisted of the RAF units that were usually embarked on aircraft carriers and fighting shifts. [RAF timeline](#) | [RAF Benevolent Fund](#)

### **The Royal Air Force Structure: 1925 to 1936**

An organisation called Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB) was formed in **1925** as an RAF Command organisation and consisted of Fighter Command and Royal Artillery/Royal Engineer anti-aircraft units.

Its main initial elements were the RAF's Metropolitan Air Force, initially comprising 25 squadrons (9 fighter), soon expanding to 52 squadrons (17 fighter, 264 heavy AA guns (Royal Artillery) and 672 searchlights (Royal Engineers). [Air Defence of Great Britain - Wikipedia](#) [Air Defence of Great Britain \(ADGB\)](#).

### **The Royal Air Force Structure: 14 July 1936 – End of WW2**

In **1936** the RAF underwent a major restructuring in that it involved replacing the unified [Air Defence of Great Britain](#) (ADGB) command with a new, functional structure that separated forces by role.

This led to the creation of four functional commands: [RAF Bomber Command](#), [RAF Fighter Command](#), [RAF Coastal Command](#) and integrating Training Command on **14 July 1936**.

When [RAF Bomber Command](#) formed in **1936**, it initially had three operational bomber groups: Nos. 1, 2, 3 and No. 6 (Auxiliary) Group. Two more groups joined in **1937**, No 4 (originally disbanded after WW1) and No 5, formed in **July 1937**.

During WW2 the structure evolved from 6 Groups in **1939** to 8 by **1945**, with specialized units like the Pathfinder Force (No. 8 Group) established in **1942** to mark targets. [RAF Bomber Command structure in WW2](#).

When [RAF Fighter Command](#) formed in **1936**, it initially consisted of only [No. 11 Group](#), that was also formed on **14 July 1936**. Its role: Defended Southern England, famously bearing the brunt of the Battle of Britain.

During World War II, RAF Fighter Command was divided into several operational Groups, most famously four Groups (10, 11, 12, 13) during the Battle of Britain in 1940, but the total number evolved, including specialized units like 38 (Airborne Forces), 60 (Signals), and 70 (Training) Groups by 1945.

[No. 10 Group](#), that originally operated 1 April 1918 to 18 January 1932, was reformed 1 June 1940.

[No. 12 Group](#), formed 1 April 1937. Provided fighter cover for the Midlands and East Anglia during WWII.

[No. 13 Group](#), formed 15 March 1939. Covered Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Northern England, active in WWII.

[No. 14 Group](#), formed initially in 1918, with a notable reactivation in 1940. Operated during WWII, tasked with fighter defence in various areas, disbanded in 1943.

[List of Royal Air Force groups - Wikipedia](#)      [Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)

In April 1918 the Royal Flying Corps [RFC](#) Middle East was renamed RAF Middle East.

It renamed again to RAF Middle East Area in March 1920, then back to RAF Middle East in April 1922, and finally became RAF Middle East Command on 29 December 1941.<sup>[1]</sup> [RAF Middle East Command - Wikipedia](#)

See Section 2 - [Command Structures - Post WW2](#) for further information.

### **RAF Balloon Command: 1 November 1938 – 5 February 1945**

The origin of Balloon Barrages dates from about 1917 when a barrage was flown in London to try and frustrate the German night raiders. [Development of Balloon Command](#)

RAF Balloon Command was formed on 1 November 1938 at RAF Stanmore Park under the control of fighter Command.

During WW2 the number of Balloon Centres increased from 4 to 16. In 1940 balloon production was around 1200 balloons per month.

The RAF used thousands of barrage balloons throughout WWII, peaking with nearly 3,000 deployed in "curtains" to stop V1 flying bombs in 1944, though numbers varied, reaching around 1,500 by the Battle of Britain.

In 1942 approval was given for 1,246 sites to be staffed by WAAF crews, and 853 by RAF crews. The number of WAAF crews was soon increased to 1,376.

Balloon Command was disbanded on **5 February 1945**.<sup>[3]</sup>

[Balloon Command | Royal Air Force](#)      [RAF Balloon Command - Wikipedia](#)  
[Barrage Balloons in the Second World War - The Royal Air Forces Association](#)

### **RAF Ferry Command: 20 July 1941 – 25 March 1943**

RAF Ferry Command was the secretive RAF command formed on **20 July 1941** to ferry urgently needed aircraft from their place of manufacture in the United States and Canada, to the front-line operational units in Britain, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East during the Second World War.

It was later subsumed into the new Transport Command on **25 March 1943** by being reduced to Group status. [RAF Ferry Command - Wikipedia](#)

### **RAF Transport Command: 25 March 1943**

It controlled all transport aircraft of the RAF. It was established on **25 March 1943** by the renaming of the RAF Ferry Command and was subsequently renamed RAF Air Support Command in **1967**. [RAF Transport Command - Wikipedia](#)

### **World War 2: 1939-1945**

**1 January 1939**: On this date, the Royal Air Force consists of 135 squadrons: 74 bomber, 27 fighter, 12 army co-operation, 17 reconnaissance, 4 torpedo-bomber and 1 communications squadron. Additionally, the Auxiliary Air Force had grown to 19 squadrons: 3 bomber, 11 fighter, 2 army co-operation and 3 reconnaissance squadrons. [1939 - RAF Museum](#)

By the start of World War II, the RAF had expanded significantly from its **1934** strength of about 800 aircraft, growing to 157 squadrons, with an additional 19 squadrons in the Auxiliary Air Force.

On **3rd September 1939**, the start date of WW2, the RAF possessed an operational strength of 2,600 aircraft available for combat plus a further 1,100 for other uses or under repair. There were 173,958 officers and airmen.

By **May, 1945**, that strength had grown to 9,200 aircraft and 1,079,835 R.A.F, Dominion and Allied officers and airmen, of whom no less than 193,313 were aircrew. [HyperWar: Royal Air Force 1939-1945: Volume III: The Fight is Won \[Chapter 17\]](#)

During WWII, the RAF lost a total of 10,385 fighters and 12,330 bombers.

There were also approximately 112,296 RAF casualties, including killed, wounded, and missing personnel. In the Battle of Britain **10 July to 31 October 1940**, 544 pilots and crew died.

The most severe losses were in Bomber Command, with around 55,573 aircrew killed out of approximately 125,000 operational aircrew, a death rate of over

44%. Another 1,215 were wounded and 601 became prisoners of war in Fighter Command alone. [RAF Bomber Command - Wikipedia](#)

## **Bomber Command: World War 2**

At the start of World War II in **September 1939**, it had only 280 twin-engined aircraft, 23 operational squadrons and just 15,000 personnel. By **September 1944**, around a quarter of a million men and women were putting over 1,600 aircraft in the air every night. [The History of Bomber Command | IBCC](#)

## **The Battle of Britain: July to October 1940**

The Luftwaffe deployed around 1,050 fighters and 1,600 bombers, while the RAF initially had approximately 550 operational single-seat fighters, predominantly the Spitfire and Hurricane.

The RAF lost 1,023 aircraft, including aircraft destroyed in air raids, and 537 men. The Luftwaffe's losses were much higher: 1,887 aircraft and 2,662 men. [Airplanes in Battle of Britain | Research Starters | EBSCO Research](#)

## **2. Command Structures - Post WW2**

### **Strike Command: 30 April 1968**

Strike Command was formed on **30 April 1968** by the merger of Bomber Command and Fighter Command, which became No. 1 Group and No. 11 Group respectively. [RAF Strike Command - Wikipedia](#)

### **Coastal Command: 14 July 1936 to 27 November 1969**

During WW2 Coastal Command casualties amounted to 2,060 aircraft to all causes. It carried out one million flying hours, 240,000 operations and destroyed 212 U-boats.<sup>[8][9]</sup>

Coastal Command was disbanded and ceased to exist on **27 November 1969**, when it was subsumed into [RAF Strike Command](#).<sup>[2]</sup> [RAF Coastal Command - Wikipedia](#)

### **RAF Middle East Command Structure: 1 August 1945 to 31 March 1975**

On **1 August 1945** the RAF Middle East Command was absorbed into [RAF Mediterranean and Middle East](#) Command.<sup>[1]</sup> On **1 June 1949**, it was renamed Middle East Air Force.

On **1 March 1961** the Southern Group of Middle East Air Force became Near East Air Force (RAF NEAF), and was based in Cyprus.<sup>[2]</sup> RAF NEAF controlled all RAF assets in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the eastern area of Asia.

The Command was disbanded and replaced by [Air Headquarters Cyprus](#) on **31 March 1976**.<sup>[2]</sup> [Near East Air Force \(Royal Air Force\) - Wikipedia](#)

### **Strike Command: 30 April 1968**

Strike Command was formed on **30 April 1968** by the merger of Bomber Command and Fighter Command, which became No. 1 Group and No. 11 Group respectively. [RAF Strike Command - Wikipedia](#)

### **Air Command: 1 April 2007**

Air Command was established on **1 April 2007** by the merger of the Royal Air Force Strike, Personnel and Training commands. [RAF Air Command - Wikipedia](#)

RAF Air Command controls all RAF operations from RAF High Wycombe, including strike, combat, and support roles. It oversees all its activities, from frontline aircraft to support and training.

### **3. RAF Aircraft: Post WW2 - 2025**

1950: 4,510 aircraft      1960: 2,505 aircraft      1967: 2,004 aircraft  
[Raf Aircraft Strengths - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

#### **The Last RAF Bomber: 1993**

Avro Vulcan XH558 was the last strategic bomber used by the RAF and was last used operationally in **1986**. It was retired from RAF service in **1993**.

Vulcan bombers carried Britain's nuclear deterrent during part of the Cold War. Vulcan XH558's last ever flight was in **2015**. [Avro Vulcan XH558 - Wikipedia](#)

**Combat Aircraft: 1990**: Britain was reported to have as many as 463 combat aircraft. <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/royal-air-force-raf-faces-total-wipeout-in-the-event-of-war-with-russia-2/>

**Information required**: How many aircraft did the RAF have in the years between **1967** and **2009** – when the numbers reduced from 2,004 in **1967** to only 846 in **2009**.

**31 December 2009**: 846 aircraft. For a list of all aircraft types/numbers go to: [House of Commons Hansard Written Answers for 25 Jan 2010 \(pt 0003\)](#)

**2016 to 2023**: The fleet has reduced from 724 aircraft in service in **2016** to 564 in **2023**, which represents a reduction of approximately 22%. [RAF aircraft numbers drop by 22% in seven years](#)

#### **The Royal Air Force Aircraft Inventory: 12 October 2024**

**Active Inventory: 513 Aircraft**

<b>Aircraft Type</b>	<b>Active</b>	<b>%</b>
Trainers	249	48.5%
Combat/Attack	140	27.3%
Helicopter	65	12.7%
Transport	32	6.2%
Special Missions	18	3.5%
Tankers	9	1.8%

<https://www.wdmma.org/royal-air-force-britain.php> [Royal Air Force \(2025\)](#)

#### **Fighter Aircraft: 2025**

##### **F-35B Lightning**

The F-35B Lightning is a short take-off and vertical landing aircraft that can operate from aircraft carriers and in austere environments. [F-35B Lightning | Royal Air Force](#)

In **November 2025**, the UK was forecast to have 41 F-35B fighter jets, with 38 having been delivered by **July 2025**, one having been lost in a **2021** crash, leaving 37 in service at that time. [Britain to have 41 F-35 jets by May 2025, more to come](#)  
[The UK's F-35 capability](#)

### **Typhoon FGR4**

The Typhoon FGR Mk4 is a highly capable and agile combat aircraft used by the RAF. As a versatile 4th generation fighter, it can be deployed in a wide range of air operations, including air policing, peacekeeping, and high-intensity conflict.

As of **1 April 2025**, the RAF had 129 Typhoon aircraft, of which 107 are in service. The incremental drawdown of older tranche 1 variants began in **spring 2025**.  
[Typhoon fighter sovereign capability - House of Commons Library](#)  
[UK armed forces equipment and formations 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

### **Other RAF Aircraft: 2025**

Transport aircraft such as the A400M Atlas and C-17 Globemaster, and specialized aircraft like the RC-135W Rivet Joint and P-8A Poseidon.

The [RC-135W Rivet Joint](#) is an electronic reconnaissance aircraft designed for signals intelligence, while the [P-8A Poseidon](#) is a maritime patrol aircraft specializing in anti-submarine and anti-ship warfare.

The fleet also includes helicopters, trainer aircraft, and various unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) such as the MQ-9 Reaper and Watchkeeper WK450.

The RAF also continues to operate its fleet of fifty-four Chinook heavy-lift helicopters. Merlin helicopters are also in active service. The new Airbus H145 helicopter is replacing the Puma HC2 that retired from routine operations on **31 March 2025**.  
[Boeing Chinook \(UK variants\) - Wikipedia](#) [Puma HC2 | Royal Air Force](#)

[Current aircraft | Royal Air Force](#)      [Aircraft | Royal Air Force](#)  
[List of active United Kingdom military aircraft - Wikipedia](#)

### **Force Concentration: 2025**

Combat/Attack: **140** units      General Support: **124** units  
Pilot/Crew Training: **249** units      Future Procurement: **121** units

### **RAF Aircraft Fatal Accidents and Incidents: 2 October 1945 to 20 March 2018**

[List of fatal accidents and incidents involving Royal Air Force aircraft from 1945 - Wikipedia](#)  
[www.cranwellian-ian.com/ewExternalFiles/Post-WWII RAF Losses v1.3.pdf](http://www.cranwellian-ian.com/ewExternalFiles/Post-WWII RAF Losses v1.3.pdf)

## **4. RAF Stations & Bases**

Based on the RAF's rapid expansion program in the 1930s, approximately 100 permanent airfields had been constructed by the time war broke out in September 1939.

In 1939 there were only 60 military airfields in the UK, by 1940 this had increased to 280, almost tripling to over 720 by 1945. [The Development of Britain's Airfields. | Aviation Trails](#)

Thirty-six stations of all types closed during 1957. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1958/jan/29/raf-stations-closure>

In 1960, the RAF had approximately 130 operational military stations, though the total number of airfields, including those used by civil and other military purposes, was around 115. This was a significant decrease from the peak during World War II, when the number of airfields had grown to accommodate wartime needs.

By 1965, the number of RAF and other military airfields in the UK dropped to about 100, down from a high of around 720 in 1945, after the end of World War II. [List of former Royal Air Force stations | Military Wiki | Fandom](#)

In 1991 there were 97 RAF bases in UK and 15 overseas. [Raf Bases - Hansard - UK Parliament: 11 July 1991](#)

### **How many RAF stations from 1965 to 2025?**

#### **RAF Stations: 2025**

In 2025 there were 27 RAF Stations in UK of which seven are main operating bases (MOBs) for front-line RAF aircraft.

#### **Main Operating Bases**

**Air Combat:** RAF Coningsby, RAF Marham, and RAF Lossiemouth

**Combat Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR):** RAF Waddington

**Air Transport:** RAF Brize Norton

**Support Helicopter:** RAF Benson and RAF Odiham

The UK Military Flying Training System includes stations like RAF Cranwell, RAF Valley, and RAF Shawbury.

Specialist ground crew training is conducted at RAF Cosford and MOD St Athan. Some stations, like RAF Fylingdales, do not have aircraft but are important for other functions, such as radar. [RAF Stations | Royal Air Force](#)

### **US Air Force Bases in UK: November 2024**

There were approximately 100 US bases in the UK after the Second World War.

Since 1942, the United States has maintained a continuous presence in the UK – with the US Air Force currently having 13 bases on British soil.

As of **November 2024**, there were 13 bases US Air Force bases in UK.

RAF Lakenheath, RAF Croughton, RAF Welford, RAF Fairford, RAF Feltwell, RAF Barford St John, RAF Blenheim Crescent, RAF Fylingdales, RAF Menwith Hill, RAF Mildenhall, RAF Alconbury, RAF Molesworth and RAF Upwood. [On foreign soil: Find out where the US Air Force's 13 bases are located in the UK](#)

**Annex A:** A detailed listing of 27 RAF Stations active in **2025**

## 5. RAF Personnel

### Number Of Personnel

Date	Numbers	Notes	Ref
November 1918	291,170	To reduce to around 60,000 by late 1919	[13][14]
April 1919	149,196	17,267 officers, 108,753 other ranks, the remainder were WRAF	[14]
October 1919	58,000		[5]
January 1920	26,682		[15]
1927	33,009 <sup>[note 1]</sup>	Down from 35,300 in 1926	[6]
1929	28,638	3,338 officers, 25,300 other ranks	[16]
January 1934	30,381	3,334 officers, 25,170 other ranks, 1,877 apprentices and cadets	[17]
May 1936	32,456	Increase during the expansion period	[18]
September 1939	175,392	Around 118,000 estimated to be in all areas of operation apart from India	[19][20]
April 1944	1,185,913	88,615 officers, 922,892 other ranks, 174,406 WRAF	[14]
May 1945	1,079,835		[21]

[Personnel numbers in the Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)

By the time the war ended in **1945**, RAF personnel numbered 963,000, with 153,000 women in the WAAF.

When the wartime forces were demobilized in **1945**, the total strength of the RAF was reduced to about 150,000. The subsequent deterioration in the international outlook led to a fresh expansion in **1951**.

The strength of the Royal Air Force on **1 April 1951**, is expected to be about 198,000. [Air Estimates, 1950–51 - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

By **1956** the total strength was up to 257,000, but by the **early 1960s** it had again retracted to about 150,000 (including 6,000 women in the WRAF). [Royal Air Force \(RAF\) | Facts, History, & Aircraft | Britannica](#)

Date	Numbers	Notes	Ref
1952	270,000		[22]
1962	148,000		[22]
1970	108,800	15,400 civilians	[24]
1981	91,965		[27]
April 1989	93,100	14,400 officers, 72,500 other ranks, 6,200 WRAF <sup>[note 2]</sup>	[14]
April 1997	57,000	Planned reduction to 56,000 by 1999	[30]

[Personnel numbers in the Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)

According to the MOD data, the number of personnel in the RAF has seen a 41.5% drop, falling from 54,600 in **2000**, to 31,940 in **2023**. [UK Armed Forces numbers drop by almost a third in 23 years, MOD data reveals](#)

In **2010**, the number of regular personnel in the Royal Air Force was 43,800.

Official figures from [GOV.UK](#) show a figure of 37,240 personnel for **1 July 2020**, while [Statista](#) reports 37,370 for the full year

As of **1 December 2014**, there were 1,790 trained regular pilots in the Royal Air Force. This number was a slight decrease from 1,830 pilots in **December 2013**. [Joint Personnel Administration system](#).

On **1 January 2025** the RAF regular force strength was 30,364 personnel. [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 January 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

## **Women in the Royal Air Force**

The Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF), a branch of the RAF, existing from **1 April 1918** until **1 April 1920**, when it was disbanded. [Women's Royal Air Force \(World War I\) - Wikipedia](#)

On **28 June 1939** King George VI established the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) for duty with the Royal Air Force (RAF) in time of war.

With conscription for women introduced from **December 1941**, the ranks swelled further so that by **July 1943** a peak strength of 182,000 had been reached.

By **1945** a quarter of a million women had served in the WAAF in over 110 different trades. [WAAF WW2 | Women's Auxiliary Air Force | Women in RAF | RAF Museum](#)

On **1 February 1949** the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) became the [Women's Royal Air Force](#) (WRAF) once more.

In **1989**, women were allowed to become aircrew in all flying roles, though not in fast jets until **1994**.

The [Women's Royal Air Force](#) was formally merged with the Royal Air Force (RAF) on **1 April 1994**, marking the full integration of women into all branches of the air force except for the RAF Regiment.

As of **1 April 2025**, women constituted 16.1% of the Royal Air Force's personnel. Given the total RAF Regular Force strength of **30,450** personnel at that time, the number of women was about 4,902. [UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: April 2025 - GOV.UK](#) [Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 April 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

## **Personnel Status Report: 11 March 2025**

The [Royal Air Force](#) (RAF) is facing a 30% shortfall in combat-ready pilots at the ranks of Flight Lieutenant and Squadron Leader after a diversity recruitment initiative, which prioritized women and ethnic minorities, was found to be unlawful.

The initiative led to the rejection of 31 white male trainees, who later received compensation.

To address the shortage, the [RAF is urging previously rejected candidates, including older applicants with relevant flight experience, to reapply for training. RAF Faces 30% Pilot Shortfall After Unlawful Diversity Scheme Backfires | DeepNewz Britain](#)

'Woke' and 'unlawful' RAF recruitment scheme leaves service short of pilots

Candidates rejected due to an "unlawful" and "woke" recruitment practise will be targeted as the service finds itself short of pilots.

['Woke' and 'unlawful' RAF recruitment scheme leaves service short of pilots | UK | News | Express.co.uk](#)

RAF turns to Indian pilots as 'backfiring' diversity scheme leaves UK shortage.

Indian instructors will train RAF pilots in an historic move, announced as part of a deepening of military ties between the two nations. [RAF turns to Indian pilots as diversity scheme leaves UK shortage | UK | News | Express.co.uk](#)

26% of Royal Air Force personnel were officers. [Size of the UK armed forces - House of Lords Library July 2025](#)

### **Victoria Cross Awards**

In WW1 and WW2, there have been a total of 26 recipients of the VC who were serving in the Royal Air Force, including the Royal Air Force Reserve. 4 in WW1 and 22 in WW2.

In WW2 the majority were won by Bomber Command aircrew, with only one going to Fighter Command. 13 were awarded posthumously, 12 in WW2 and 1 in WW1

[List of Victoria Cross recipients of the Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)  
[The Arthur Scarf VC - RAF Museum.](#)

### **References**

MOD Data: [Request size of the army, navy and air force from 1700 to 2016 Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 January 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

## **6. RAF Regiment**

Prime Minister Churchill made the RAF responsible for the defence of its own bases and the RAF Regiment was formed on **1 February 1942**, with its first headquarters established at [RAF Belton Park](#), Grantham, Lincolnshire.

From the start it had 66,000 personnel drawn from the former Defence Squadrons Nos. 701–850.

The regiment developed two main types of squadrons: Field Squadrons and Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) Squadrons.

A training school and depot for the RAF Regiment was established in India in **October 1942**.

As of **31 December 1946**, the Royal Air Force (RAF) Regiment had 21 squadrons. [List of RAF Regiment units - Wikipedia](#)

In **1950**, RAF Regiment squadrons included a mix of field, anti-aircraft, mobile wings and 12 anti-aircraft squadrons. Additionally, there were several Anti-Aircraft Flights.

The RAF Regiment comes under command of [2 Group](#), [Air Command](#). that was reformed on **7 January 2000** to take control of air transport, air-to-air refuelling and airborne early warning within the RAF.

“Overview of RAF Regiment squadrons - each with unique capabilities designed to meet diverse mission requirements”. For further details select the following link: [RAF Regiment Squadrons: Structure, Locations and Roles](#)

### **Regiment Units: 6 Squadrons (2025)**

[No. 1 Squadron RAF Regiment](#) – Specialises in Armoured Vehicles.

[No. II Squadron RAF Regiment](#) – Who have parachute capabilities and link in with the Special Forces Support Group (SFSG).

[No. 15 Squadron RAF Regiment](#) – Field Squadron.

[No. 34 Squadron RAF Regiment](#) – Specialise in Counter-Unmanned Air Systems.

[No. 51 Squadron RAF Regiment](#) – Field Squadron.

[No. 63 Squadron RAF Regiment \(King's Colour Squadron\)](#) – who perform ceremonial duties whilst also being a Field Squadron

### **Base of the 6 Field Squadrons**

[1 Squadron](#) - RAF Honington,

[II Squadron](#) (Parachute) - RAF Brize Norton

[15 Squadron](#) - RAF Marham

[34 Squadron](#) - RAF Leeming

[51 Squadron](#) - RAF Lossiemouth

[63 Squadron](#) (King's Colour Squadron) - RAF Northolt

## **Combat Readiness Force**

**Head Quarters:** [RAF Honington](#)

No. 2 Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems Wing - [RAF Leeming](#)

No. 3 Force Protection Wing - [RAF Marham](#)

No. 5 Force Protection Wing - [RAF Lossiemouth](#)

No. 7 Force Protection Wing - [RAF Coningsby](#)

No. 20 Wing RAF Regiment - RAF Honington

[RAF Regiment Squadrons | RAF Regiment Association Official Website - Home for all Rock Apes](#)

The RAF Regiment is the RAF's organic defensive security force and comes under command of [2 Group](#), [Air Command](#).

## **Auxiliary Regiment Squadrons**

There are 7 Auxiliary Regiment Squadron:

[No. 2503 Squadron RAuxAF Regiment \(County of Lincoln\)](#)

[No. 2620 Squadron RAuxAF Regiment \(County of Norfolk\)](#)

[No. 2622 Squadron RAuxAF Regiment \(Highland\)](#)

[No. 2623 Squadron RAuxAF Regiment \(East Anglian\)](#)

[No. 2624 Squadron RAuxAF Regiment \(County of Oxford\)](#)

[No 603 Squadron RAuxAF \(City of Edinburgh\)](#)

[No 609 Squadron RAuxAF \(West Riding\)](#)

## **Detailed History of The RAF Regiment**

[Regiment Sqns 1-533](#)

[RAF Regiment - Wikipedia](#)

[www.rafregt.org.uk/raf-regiment-association-information/raf-regiment-history/](http://www.rafregt.org.uk/raf-regiment-association-information/raf-regiment-history/)

## **RAF Regiment Personnel**

As of **March 2021**, there were approximately 1,850 regulars and 570 reserve personnel.

A typical RAF Regiment squadron consists of about 170 personnel.

In **March 2021**, it was announced that the regular force is expected to be reduced by 300 personnel by **2023**. [RAF Regiment - Wikipedia](#)

## **Women in the Regiment**

The RAF opened its Ground Close Combat roles, including those in the Regiment, to women in **September 2017**.

The first woman joined the RAF Regiment in **January 2020** when Leading Aircraftwoman (LAC) Georgia Sandover graduated as a gunner. [First female RAF Regiment Gunner to complete 20-week course | Royal Air Force](#)

“The first female RAF Regiment Officers have successfully completed the 25-week course required to become members of the RAF Regiment and graduated at [RAF Honington](#), Suffolk”. **8 August 2020** [First RAF Regiment Female Officers Graduate | Royal Air Force](#)

## **RAF Regiment Depot/Headquarters**

The RAF Regiment Depot/Headquarters has moved three times, starting at Alma House (RAF Alma Park) in **December 1941** before moving to RAF Belton Park in **February 1942**, then RAF Catterick at the start of **1946**, and finally to its current location at RAF Honington, Suffolk in **June 1994**. [RAF Honington | Royal Air Force](#)  
[www.rafregt.org.uk](http://www.rafregt.org.uk): RAF Regiment Association Official Website:

## **7. RAF Training**

The first dedicated RAF training course began almost immediately after the RAF's formation in 1918, with flying training starting at RAF Cranwell in 1918. This led to the establishment of the RAF College in 1920 as the world's first air academy, though technical training also evolved rapidly at RAF Halton with schemes like the Aircraft Apprentice Scheme starting in 1920.

### **Key Milestones:**

**1918:** Flying training commences at RAF Cranwell as the RAF is formed.

**1919 (July):** Netheravon Flying School forms, later becoming No. 1 Flying Training School (FTS) by renaming on 23 December 1919, making it the world's oldest military pilot training school.

**1920:** The RAF College is officially established at Cranwell, becoming the first air academy. It was established by [Sir Hugh Trenchard](#) in 1920, with the first cadets arriving on 5 February 1920. The Aircraft Apprentice Scheme also began at RAF Halton.

So, while initial training happened in 1918, formal, structured courses like those at Cranwell and Halton began in earnest in 1919-1920, right after the RAF's creation.

### **RAF Training Command: 1936 - 2007**

RAF Training Command was formed on 1 May 1936. It was the Royal Air Force's command responsible for flying and ground training from 1936 to 1940 and again from 1968 to 1977.

Its structure changed significantly during on 27 May 1940, with the creation of separate Flying Training and Technical Training Commands (for ground crew), before being reformed in 1968 and eventually absorbed into Air Command by 1.

**1 June 1968:** The two commands merged again to reform Training Command, taking responsibility for initial and flying training, plus Air Cadets.

**1977:** Training Command was absorbed into the larger RAF Support Command.

**1994:** Support Command split into Logistics Command and Personnel and Training Command (PTC).

**April 2007:** PTC was absorbed into the new Air Command, the current structure for RAF operations. [Training Command | Historical Periods | Taking flight | Exhibitions & Displays | Research | RAF Museum](#)  
[RAF Training Command - Wikipedia](#)

## **Training Status: 2025**

A prestige plan to concentrate RAF recruit training for both officers and other ranks at RAF Cranwell has been put back by five years until **2030** at the earliest.

It had been intended to close the other ranks phase one recruit training centre at RAF Halton in Buckinghamshire in **2025** and move the operation to RAF College in Lincolnshire, where the service's officers have been trained since **1919**.

[www.defenceeye.co.uk/2025/10/17/plans-to-move-raf-other-ranks-training-to-cranwell-delayed/](http://www.defenceeye.co.uk/2025/10/17/plans-to-move-raf-other-ranks-training-to-cranwell-delayed/)

## **22 GROUP**

22 Group is responsible for all aspects of RAF Recruiting, Selection and Basic Training.

It provides the qualified and skilled personnel that the RAF and the other two Services need to carry out operations world-wide and has a wide area of interest with responsibilities for many aspects of training.

Its primary functions are to provide the Initial Training to RAF Officers at RAF Cranwell and Basic Training for aviators at RAF Halton, to run the Royal Air Force Air Cadets (RAFAC) and to provide specialist joint training to personnel from all three services.

This specialist training covers areas such as Aeronautical Engineering, Communications and Information Systems, Electro & Mechanical Engineering, and flying training for all types of aircraft. [www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/groups/no-22-group/](http://www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/groups/no-22-group/)

For further details select:

[UK Military Flying Training System](#)  
[No 22 Group | Royal Air Force](#)

## **History of 22 Group.**

Although No. 22 Group was due to be formed on **1 April 1918**, the same day as the Royal Air Force was established, it was not activated until **1 July 1918**, in the RAF's North Western Area. It was activated at RAF East Fortune, but moved its headquarters to the Station Hotel, Stirling.

On **1 August 1943**, the group was re-established as No. 22 (Technical Training) Group in [Technical Training Command](#). It was responsible for all training in ground trades, from electronics to cooking.]

The group continued in its training function for nearly thirty years, until it was disbanded **31 January 1972**.<sup>[4]</sup> [No. 22 Group RAF - Wikipedia](#)

The responsibility for RAF training from **1972** to **1994** was primarily held by the Training Command, which was absorbed into Support Command in **1977** until **1994**.

[Modern flying training 1970-present](#) | [Historical Periods](#) | [Taking flight](#) | [Exhibitions & Displays](#) | [Research](#) | [RAF Museum](#)

Training Group (TG) was formed on **1<sup>st</sup> April 1994** from the AOC Training Units with Personnel and Training Command its controlling formation.

The current creation of No. 22 Group was established on **30<sup>th</sup> October 2006**, once again as No. 22 (Training) Group,

22 Group is responsible for:[\[2\]](#)

- Youth engagement across the UK;
- Recruiting, selection and basic training;
- Defence technical training – communications & engineering;
- [UK Military Flying Training System](#) (For further details select this link)

[No 22 Group | Royal Air Force](#)

## **Initial Training**

**RAF Halton:** This is the base for non-officer recruit training, which lasts for 70 days.

## **Specialist Training**

**RAF Valley:** This location is crucial for fast jet training.

**RAF Cosford:** 1 School of Technical Training (No.1 S of TT) has been based at the [Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering](#), Cosford<sup>[9]</sup> from **1993** to the present time.

With over 3,400 apprentices on programme at any one time, it is one of the largest providers in the country. RAF Apprenticeships delivered at RAF Cosford were recently recognised as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. [RAF Cosford | Royal Air Force](#)  
[Royal Air Force flies high in National Apprenticeship Awards | Royal Air Force](#) (October 2020)

Information about the Royal Air Force Apprenticeships scheme may be found at: [recruitment.raf.mod.uk/apprenticeships](http://recruitment.raf.mod.uk/apprenticeships)

**RAF Honington:** This is the site for specialist training for the RAF Regiment, including the Junior Regiment Officers' Course. [www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/groups/no-22-group/](http://www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/groups/no-22-group/)

## **Previous RAF Apprentice and Boy Entrants and Schemes**

The RAF had two main youth training programs: the [Aircraft Apprentice Scheme](#) (**1920 to 1993**) for boys with good educational backgrounds, and the [Boy Entrant Scheme](#) (**1934 to 1965**) which took boys with less academic success.

### **History of the Aircraft Apprentice Scheme: 1920 to 1993**

The first entry of 235 recruits began their apprenticeship at Cranwell while permanent accommodation was built at RAF Halton.

The Schools at Halton and Cranwell were renamed No 1 and No 2 School of Technical Training respectively in **March 1920** and Halton's first Apprentice Entry, No 5, arrived in **January 1922**, at which time the rank of Aircraft Apprentice replaced the earlier term Boy Mechanic. [RAF Apprentice Scheme | Royal Air Force](#)

The original Royal Air Force (RAF) Aircraft Apprentice Scheme ended in **1993**, after training over 40,000 apprentices since its beginning in **1920**. Although the specific programme concluded, the RAF still offers modern apprenticeships and recruits new apprentices each year for various roles.

The main location for the RAF Apprentice Scheme was [RAF Halton](#), which became the "spiritual home of the Apprentices".

While training initially began at RAF Cranwell, it moved to Halton, just outside of Wendover in Buckinghamshire, and remained there as the primary site for over 40,000 apprentices until the original scheme ended.

**Primary Location:** The scheme's headquarters were at No. 1 School of Technical Training at RAF Halton, Buckinghamshire.

**Initial Start:** The very first apprentices started training at Cranwell while permanent facilities were being built at Halton.

**Other Schools:** Other RAF apprentice schemes for different roles were also established elsewhere, such as the Administrative Apprentice Training School at [St Athan](#), Wales. [A Definitive History of the RAF Aircraft Apprentice Scheme - Min Larkin](#)

When the Scheme closed in **1993**, 40,000 Apprentices had graduated. Seventeen had subsequently won the Sword of Honour at the Cadet College Cranwell.

Of the 12,000 Apprentices commissioned, 120 achieved very high rank, with several serving on the Air Force Board. Thirteen were Knighted and countless others awarded State Honours. [Halton Aircraft Apprentice Scheme – Buckinghamshire Culture](#)

For a short history of the Royal Air Force Aircraft Apprentice Signals and Electronics Trade Groups Training select: [History of App training](#)

### **History of the Boy Entrants Scheme: 1934 to 1965**

Boy Entrant training in the Royal Air Force started in **1934** when some 90 boys aged between 15 & 16 years of age began training as Wireless Operators, Aerial Photographers & Armourers.

Compared with the better-known Aircraft Apprentice scheme, Boy Entrant training was introduced to give boys from more disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity of a Royal Air Force career.

The last pre-war course graduated in **June 1940**. Training recommenced with the 1st (post war) Entry in **May 1947**.

The Boy Entrant scheme continued until **July 1965** when the 51st Entry (final entry) graduated from RAF stations Cosford, St Athans & Hereford.

[RAF Boy Entrants 45th Entry Cosford | History of the Boy Entrants](#)

Over the years training took place at various stations, including RAF Cosford, RAF Yatesbury, RAF Compton Bassett, RAF St Athan, RAF Hereford, and RAF Locking

Sources indicate that "many thousands" of boys trained under the Royal Air Force Boy Entrant Scheme between **1934** and **1965**. Specific data confirms at least 13,000 boy entrants graduated from RAF Cosford alone. [Royal Air Force boy entrants - Wikipedia](#)

### **History of the RAF Cosford Boy Entrants**

The RAF aimed to concentrate the training of all Boy Entrants at Cosford. On **15 May 1950** an advance party of 2 officers, 18 NCOs and 65 boys arrived from RAF Locking, 94 boys from RAF Kirkham, and finally on **23 May** the 285 boys of the new entry (No 10) arrived, bringing the total strength of No 1 Wing to 806.

The instruction of Boy Entrants at Cosford commenced on **23 May 1950**  
[Microsoft Word - History of the Boy Entrants 2.docx](#) (40<sup>th</sup> Entry web site data)

### **Other Training and Facilities**

The RAF uses a variety of other bases for ongoing and specialized training, and also conducts adventurous training at locations like [FDTC Crickhowell](#).

For information on the different types of Royal Air Force ground trades go to [List of Royal Air Force ground trades - Wikipedia](#)

### **Officer Flying Training**

Royal Air Force flying trainees undergo two main phases of training during the process of becoming a RAF pilot.

#### **1. Initial Officer Training Course**

**Phase 01:** Each RAF officer begins their career by completing the Initial Officer Training Course at **RAF Cranwell** in Lincolnshire, where the 24-week course is split into four terms. Note: 18 weeks for previously serving individuals. [RAF Recruitment | RAF Officer Initial Training | Royal Air Force](#)

The Officer and Aircrew Cadet Training Unit (OACTU) is located at RAF Cranwell and consists of four squadrons for different types of recruits. [Modular Initial Officer Training Course - Wikipedia](#) [Royal Air Force College Cranwell - Wikipedia](#)

## **2. Flying Training: Phase 02 (since 1993)**

**Elementary Flying Training**: 25-27 weeks, and 56 flying hours.

**Basic Fast Jet Training**: 43 weeks, and 108 flying hours.

**Advanced Jet Training**: 54 weeks, and 94 flying hours.

**Operational Conversion Unit (OCU)**: Training durations vary significantly by aircraft type and role, ranging from a few months to nearly a year and 52 flying hours.

**RAF Coningsby**: Home to No. 29 Squadron, the RAF's Typhoon OCU.

**RAF Valley**: Where fast jet training leads into the OCU pipeline.

**RAF Leeming/ RAF Leuchars / RAF Coningsby**: Locations for historical OCUs like No. 228 OCU (night fighters/F-4 Phantoms).

RAF Bassingbourn / RAF Cottesmore / RAF Marham: Stations for the 231 OCU (Canberra bombers). [What are the Phases of Training in the RAF Pilot Flying Training Pipeline? – Boot Camp & Military Fitness Institute](#)

Pilots of rotary-wing spend 18 months flying twin-engine Juno and Jupiter helicopters at RAF Shawbury. [RAF Recruitment | Pilot | Royal Air Force](#)

## **3. Officers: Non-Flying Training**

Non-Flying Officers (NFOs) are extensively trained at specialist bases like RAF Digby, Spadeadam, Waddington, Boulmer and Henlow.

These sites focus on technical, intelligence, command, and ground support roles, not just aircrew, with every officer undergoing foundational training and then specialist development for their branch.

### **RAF Stations: Non- Flying Officer Training**

**RAF Digby (Communications/Cyber)**: A key hub for signals, intelligence, and cyber training, essential for many NFO roles beyond flying, covering technical and information systems.

**RAF Spadeadam (Electronic Warfare)**: Provides crucial electronic warfare tactics training for all aircrew and personnel, including NFOs in relevant branches, preparing them for modern threats, notes [RAF Spadeadam's official page](#) and [Wikipedia](#).

**RAF Waddington (ISTAR/Air Warfare Centre)**: Home to intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) and the Air Warfare Centre, training personnel for integrated mission support and complex scenarios.

**RAF Boulmer & RAF Henlow (Support)**: These stations support various ground branches, with Henlow having a historical role in officer training and Boulmer focusing on command and control/air defence, crucial for NFO development, as shown by Henlow Parish Council and [RAF Waddington page](#).

## 8. Summary and Historical Web Sites

YEAR	Aircraft	Stations	Personnel
<b>3 Sep 1939</b>	2,600	About 100	173,958
<b>May 1945</b>	9,200	720	1,079,835
<b>1950</b>	4,510		
<b>1952</b>	6,300		270,000
<b>1960</b>	2,505		163,476
<b>April 1989</b>	Over 1,700		93,100
<b>11 July 1991</b>		97+15	About 75,000
<b>April 1997</b>	Est 670		57,000
<b>1 April 2025</b>	513	27	30,450

+15 overseas

[Raf Aircraft Strengths - Hansard - UK Parliament: 2 July 1968](#)

[RAF combat aircraft numbers \[Archive\] - PPRuNe Forums](#)

[Royal Air Force official website \(History section\)](#): This is the official starting point for information about the RAF's past, including links to the Air Historical Branch and the RAF Museum.

[Air Historical Branch \(AHB\)](#): The official unit of professional historians within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) who provide historical research and publish narratives and translations of historical documents, many available as free PDFs.

[RAF Museum](#): The museum's website is an extensive resource offering access to its collections, archives, photos, and research tools, including the digitised World War One casualty cards and the RAF Muster Roll.

[The National Archives \(TNA\)](#): TNA holds the official government records for the UK, including vast quantities of RAF service records, operations record books (ORBs), and combat reports, with many available for online viewing or download.

[RAF Historical Society](#): An independent society formed to study and promote RAF history, it provides access to journals and transcripts of lectures and seminars.  
[www.cranwellian-ian.com](http://www.cranwellian-ian.com) [CHS Home Page](#)

A very interesting web site: [Royal Air Force \(RAF\) | Facts, History, & Aircraft | Britannica](#)

Royal Air Force in World War II  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal\\_Air\\_Force\\_in\\_World\\_War\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Force_in_World_War_II)

List of Historical Aircraft of the RAF - Since 1918.  
[List of aircraft of the Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)

[Category: Aerial operations and battles of World War II involving the United Kingdom - Wikipedia](#) Some of the key events from the RAF's history.

[RAF timeline | RAF Benevolent Fund](#)

At the end of the Cold War in 1989, the structure of the RAF was as follows: [Outline of the British Royal Air Force at the end of the Cold War - Wikipedia](#)

Includes a list of active RAF aircraft: revision history - circa Sept 2025  
[List of active United Kingdom military aircraft - Wikipedia](#)

The planning for the future of the Royal Air Force: revision history circa - Oct 2025  
[Future of the Royal Air Force - Wikipedia](#)