

# RAF COLLEGE CRANWELL

## Inspirational Leaders



Identified by Cadets at the RAF College  
In the RAF Centenary Year

# Gp Capt Leonard Cheshire VC DSO\*\* DFC

## Gp Capt Geoffrey Leonard Cheshire VC DSO\*\* DFC

Read by Officer Cadet Benedict Morris



Born in Chester in 1917, Cheshire joined Oxford UAS and commissioned into the RAFVR in 1937. He reported to his first operational unit, 102 Sqn, in June 1940 as a bomber pilot. During November 1940, despite severe flak damage to his Whitley bomber during a raid over Cologne, he successfully prosecuted his target and immediately won the DSO. Having completed a full tour of 30 ops, he refused to be rested and immediately volunteered for another during which time he won the DFC in March 1941. A month later, he was awarded a further DSO and was now the most decorated pilot in Bomber Command. On promotion to Gp Capt in 1943, at age 25, Cheshire commanded RAF Marston Moor, before reverting to Wg Cdr to command 617 Sqn as the non-flying admin routine did not suit him. Whilst in command of 617 Sqn, Cheshire increased low level bombing efficiency and increased bombing accuracy exponentially. He completed 103 bombing sorties with 617 Sqn and was awarded the VC in September 1944 for an extended period of operational flying and outstanding prowess rather than for a specific act of supreme valour. In 1944, he established the Cheshire Foundation Home for the Incurably Sick to which he dedicated the rest of his life. He became a Life Peer in 1991.



# Sqn Cdr Percy Cleave CBE

Sqn Ldr Thomas Percy Gleave CBE

Read by WO Kelly Clayton



Born in Liverpool in 1908, Sqn Ldr Gleave joined the RAF in September 1930 and on completion of flying training, joined 1 Sqn at RAF Tangmere in September 1931. At the outbreak of war, Gleave served at RAF Stanmore as their Bomber Liaison Officer before taking command of 253 Sqn at RAF Kirton-in-Lindsay. On 31 August 1940, Gleave was shot down during a Luftwaffe attack on RAF Biggin Hill. He bailed out but was very badly burned and was admitted to Orpington Hospital before being moved to Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead where he underwent pioneering plastic surgery by Archie McIndoe. This pioneering work led to the formation on 20 July 1941 of the Guinea Pig Club with McIndoe as the President and Gleave as the Vice-President and founder member. After considerable plastic surgery to his face and limbs, Gleave returned to operational service in October 1941. He served with Distinction, gaining several promotions and in 1943 Gleave wrote the overall Op OVERLORD plan with Col Melville Phillips of the USAAF. Gleave was eventually invalided from the RAF following further plastic surgery in 1953. He continued as the Vice-President of the Guinea Pig Club with the title of Chief Guinea Pig. Furthermore, in retirement he was the historian of the Battle of Britain Fighter Association until his death in 1993.



# Sqn Cdr Ulric Cross DSP DFC

Sqn Ldr Ulric Cross DSO DFC

Read by FS Duncan Tait



Born in Trinidad in 1917, Sqn Ldr Cross joined the RAF in 1941 and trained as a navigator at RAF Cranwell. Following training he was posted to 139 (Jamaica) Sqn at RAF Marham. He made a number of precision daylight bombing attacks at low level over France and Germany before converting to night operations with the elite Pathfinder Force. On one occasion, Cross and his pilot flew a damaged Mosquito aircraft over 500 miles back home on one engine whilst steadily losing height and at a reduced speed eventually crash landing on the first available airfield in Norfolk. Despite being eligible of a rest on completion of his first tour of 30 ops, he volunteered to continue. He also declined to be rested after completing 50 ops and was subsequently awarded the DFC. On completion of 80 sorties including 21 to Berlin, he was rested at the end of 1944, shortly afterwards being awarded the DSO for his "fine example of keenest and devotion to duty along with exceptional navigation ability". Sqn Ldr Cross was the highest ranking West Indian airman of World War II and became the most decorated Caribbean airman of the war. He left the RAF in 1947 and subsequently died in 2013.



# Sqn Cdr Neville Duke DSO DFC\*\* AFC

Sqn Ldr Neville Duke DSO DFC\*\* AFC

Read by Mr Brian Braid



Born in Kent in 1922, Sqn Ldr Neville Duke joined the RAF in June 1940 and on completion of flying training in April 1941 was posted to RAF Biggin Hill. Initially flying Spitfires, he earned his first victory over Dunkirk and his second followed within a few weeks. Posted to the Middle East to fly Tomahawks, Duke was shot down twice and forced to crash land in the desert within the space of six days. He soon recovered and achieved eight confirmed victories earning him the DFC. In 1943, in the space of three months, Duke had destroyed twelve enemy fighters and two bombers over Tunisia and was awarded a bar to his DFC and an immediate DSO. Returning to Spitfires and operating over Italy, Duke claimed five further victories and earned a second bar to his DFC for "displaying the highest standard of skill, gallantry and determination". By the age of 22, Duke had completed three operational tours, flown 486 sorties and destroyed 27 enemy aircraft making him the RAF's outstanding and highest scoring fighter pilot in the Mediterranean theatre. After the war, Duke was selected for Empire Test Pilot School and flew jets for the first time. He pioneered flying jet aircraft at very high speeds operating up to 50,000 feet. This pioneering work earned him the AFC. Duke had been decorated six times during World War II and post-war became one of the foremost test pilots of his time achieving world record flights including a world speed record of 727 mph in a Hawker Hunter. In 1952, at the Farnborough Air Show, he created a sonic boom by descending at 50,000 ft a minute in a 40-degree dive. Throughout his aviation career, Duke was known for pushing boundaries and inspiring others to achieve.



# Flt Lt Michelle Goodman DFC

## Flt Lt Michelle Goodman DFC

Read by Mrs Lou Short



Born in Bristol in 1976, Flt Lt Goodman joined the RAF in May 2000. After five years of training, she became combat ready in May 2005 and joined the Merlin helicopter fleet with 28 (AC) Sqn at RAF Benson. She completed three operational tours on Op TELIC and in June 2007 was flying out of Basra in Iraq. Whilst a member of the Instant Reaction Team during her third deployment, she was called upon to recover a casualty from a high-risk area within Basra city. She was aware that this would be an unfamiliar and highly dangerous landing site and she would be operating under intense enemy fire at low level and operating on night-vision goggles. Despite this challenging and complex approach and operating at the limit of aircraft capability, Goodman was able to land her helicopter next to the casualty. She remained on the ground to allow medics to treat the casualty despite four mortar rounds landing close to her aircraft. Once the casualties were onboard, Flt Lt Goodman skillfully maneuvered her helicopter away from further mortar engagement and recovered her crew, casualties and aircraft safely to the British Field Hospital. Without her skillful, brave and calm airmanship skills, the casualty would have died. For her actions, she was awarded the DFC and is the first and currently only female RAF pilot to be awarded this honour.



# ASO Noor Khan GC MBE

## Assistant Section Officer Noor Inayat Khan GC MBE Read by Miss Hazel Crozier



Born in Moscow in 1914, she joined the WAAF in 1940 following her family's move from France to the UK and trained as a radio operator. Owing to her knowledge of France and her fluency of French, she was asked to join the Special Operational Executive (SOE) and given the codenamed 'Madeline'. Parachuted into France on 17 July 1943, before her training had been fully completed, Noor immediately began to make contacts. Following the arrest of the other Prosper Agents, Noor quickly became the sole radio operator in Paris and managed to stay one step ahead of the German security services. Knowing the danger she was exposed to, the SOE HQ in London pressed for her return however she continued to serve on the front line. She was eventually betrayed and arrested on 12 October 1943 having inexplicably saved all her transmitted and received messages and security codes in a notebook beside her bed in clear English. She resisted interrogation for months even trying to escape twice, eventually being interred at Dachau concentration camp. It was here that she was shot at point blank range through the head at 30 years of age. Although her field career lasted only from July to October 1943, in recognition of her bravery and sacrifice she was awarded the GC and MBE. Noor was one of the groundbreaking women who in the 1940s abandoned what was considered the 'proper' role for women and was one of only 39 agents who served in France; one of 13 who died in the performance of their duty.



# Third Officer Joy Lofthouse ATA

Third Officer Joy Lofthouse ATA  
Read by Officer Cadet Adam Harper



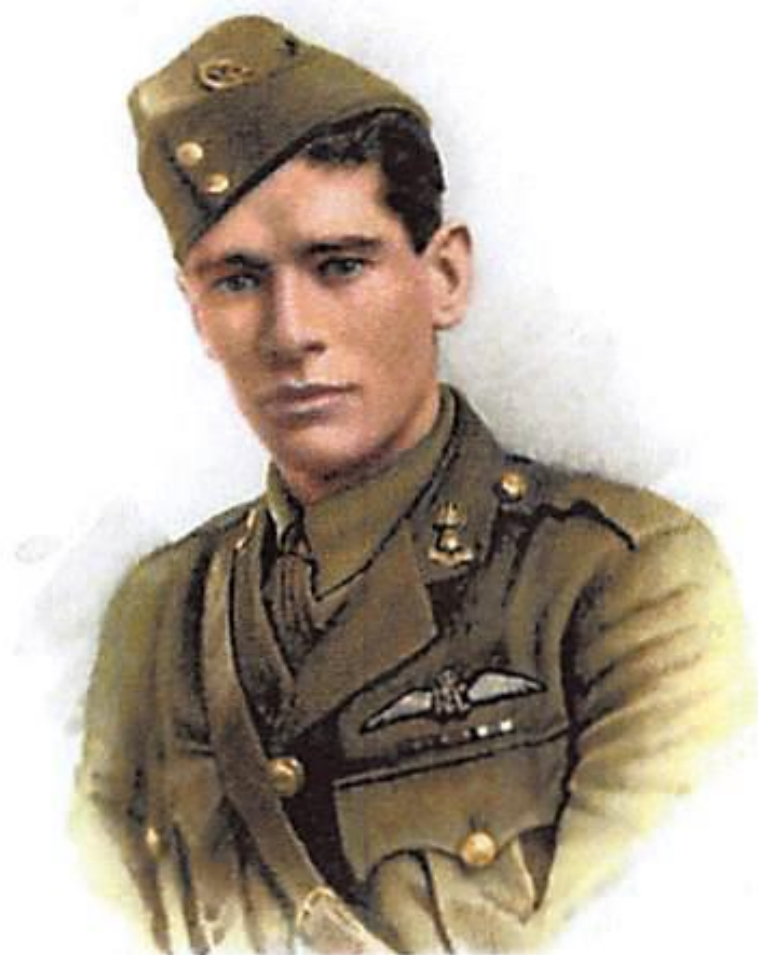
Born in Cirencester in 1923, Third Officer Lofthouse joined the ATA in 1943 having answered an advert in the 'Aeroplane' magazine. The ATA had run out of trained pilots and were therefore recruiting; Lofthouse was selected from fierce competition even though she had never even driven a car. She soon became one of 164 female ATA pilots of World War II who ferried military aircraft around the UK. After qualifying, she flew Miles Magisters, Tiger Moths, and later, flew fighters including the Super Marine Spitfire. In total, she flew more than 18 different types of aircraft, including 400 mph fighter aircraft, relying on nothing more than a map and the view out of the cockpit for navigation. The Spitfire was her favourite aircraft and she described it as being "the nearest thing to having wings of your own". After the war, Lofthouse said that she felt lucky that she was allowed to do something so rewarding and that it was good to have something interesting in her life. She was subsequently reunited with her beloved Spitfire in 2015, where she took control of the dual aircraft for the first time in 70 years.



# Maj Mick Mannock VC DSO\*\* MC\*

Major Mick Mannock VC DSO\*\* MC\*

Read by SAC Arran Robb



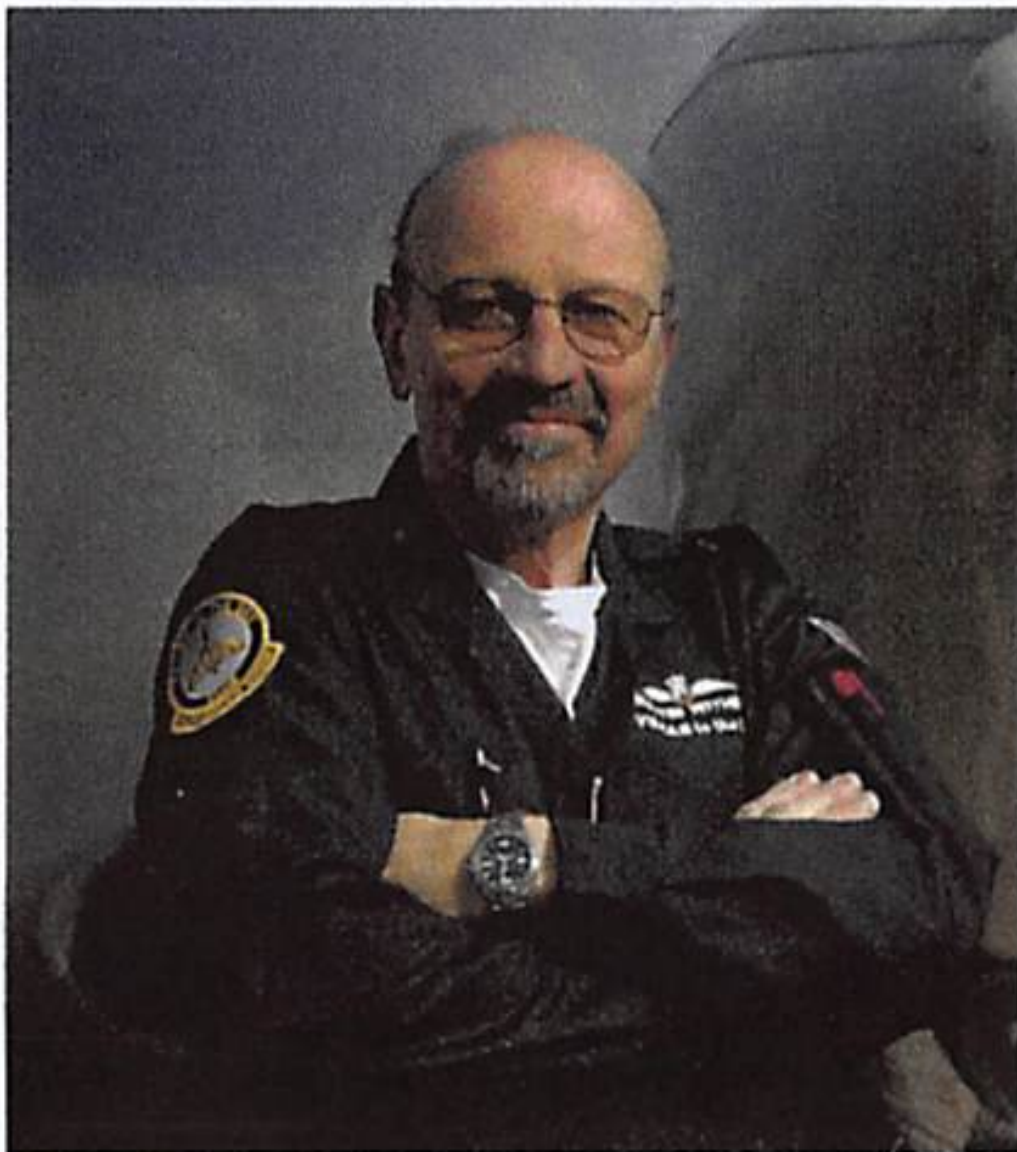
Born in Brighton in 1887, Major Mannock became an officer in the Royal Engineers before transferring to the RFC in August 1916. He became operational with 40 Sqn in April 1917 and served as a fighter pilot claiming his first victory, of a Kite Balloon, in May 1917. He was credited with a destruction of five more enemy aircraft in July 1917 and earned promotion to Captain and awarded the MC. Between 20 July and 30 September 1917, he claimed a further 20 enemy aircraft and for his actions was awarded a bar to the MC. By the end of May 1918, flying with 74 Sqn, Mannock had added 31 further victories and was awarded the DSO twice! Over the next two months he added a further 19 victories to his tally before being shot down and crashing behind German lines; he did not survive this crash. With 73 accredited air combat victories, Mannock was Britain's highest scoring fighter pilot in World War I, yet his VC was not awarded until July 1919 almost a year after his death.



# Flt Lt Martin Withers DFC

## Flt Lt Martin Withers DFC

Read by Mr Jay Young



Born in Easingwold, near York in 1946, Flt Lt Withers joined the RAF in 1968 and initially instructed in the Jet Provost aircraft before commencing service in Lincolnshire flying Vulcan aircraft. During 1982, Flt Lt Withers was part of the 'Black Buck' raids to bomb Port Stanley airfield during the Falklands War. He was the captain of the reserve aircraft but within minutes the primary Vulcan became unserviceable and Withers became responsible for the execution of the mission. Departing from the UK, Withers flew a 3,400 mile outward leg encountering severe weather conditions, unserviceable tanker aircraft and hazardous nighttime air-to-air refueling. Withers refueled his aircraft 17 times in total, on the last refueling, the Victor donor aircraft was short of fuel and could only deliver Withers with 7,000 gallons. Despite this low fuel load, Withers did not turn back as he was only 290 miles from his target and he began his descent and bombing run. Withers realized the strategic affect that his decision would have on the outcome of the Falklands War. His decision making, bravery and leadership were an inspiration to his crew and his actions ensured that not only was Port Stanley airfield temporarily denied to the enemy, but the affect on the morale of the local Argentine forces was devastating. Withers had proven after covering a distance of 6,800 miles that Argentina mainland was within the reach of RAF bombers. The runway at Port Stanley was repaired but the occupying forces were never able to use the runway again for fast jets. He was awarded