THE SOCIETE FRANCO-ANGLAISE DE CARDIFF AND

THE FREE FRENCH IN SOUTH WALES

1940 - 1945

A second Supplement to the previously published
Centenary of the Société Franco-Britannique de Cardiff 1906-2006

April 2021

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A second Supplement to the previously published
Centenary of the Société Franco-Britannique de Cardiff 1906-2006

1. Recollections of the Free French in Cardiff during World War 2

By Arlette Ragody-Hughes

2. Background to the Arrival of the Free French Air Force in South Wales

By John Martin

Cover illustrations: top left, original artwork from the programme for a meeting of the Society on 2 December 1911 drawn by Marcel Ragody, president of the Society in 1912; bottom right, photograph of a ceremony outside 36 Park Place on April 5, 1995, attended by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff, to unveil a plaque commemorating the assistance given by the Society to the Free French. (Society represented by, from left, Pauline Thompson and Arlette Ragody-Hughes).

Acknowledgements.

The history of the friendship and support offered by the Société Franco-Anglaise de Cardiff during World War 2 to the members of the Forces Françaises Libres, and especially to the airmen based at RAF St Athan, was briefly described in the *Centenary History* of the Society published in 2006. The discovery in 2016 of the text of a talk by Arlette Ragody-Hughes, which is the first section of this work, makes it possible to tell this story in much greater detail.

I am grateful to the children of Arlette (Michel Hughes, Jocelyne Bangham, Chantal Marsh and Francine Adams) for permission to publish this text and to include many photographs from the Ragody family archives. Francine Adams has been particularly helpful in discussing this material and in providing additional information. The Ragody family archives are now housed in the Yorkshire Air Museum, at Elvington, which has a section dedicated to the French Squadrons based at Elvington during World War 2.

I have added a section to provide a background as to how and when the Free French Air Force came to be based at RAF St Athan, close to Cardiff. I would like to thank the RAF personnel at St Athan, especially Andy Brooks, for providing a wealth of information about the history of the base and also for locating in the archives a number of pictures of the base and its personnel from that time.

As with the earlier histories of the Society, I have continued to benefit from the generous help given by the staff of Cardiff Central Library, the Glamorgan Records Office and Cardiff University Library.

John Martin, April 2021

The Société Franco-Anglaise de Cardiff and the Free French 1940-45

1. Recollections of the Free French in Cardiff during World War 2

by Arlette Ragody-Hughes

The *Centenary History of the Société*, published in 2006, gave a brief account of the activities of the Society during the First and Second World Wars.

In 1914 the Society was only eight years old, but had a membership of more than 250 including many young men of military age. By 1917 the minutes record that over 30 members of the Society – French and British – were serving in France, and a board with their names was put up in the clubhouse at 36 Park Place. The minutes also record that the ladies of the Society established sewing circles, under the direction of Mme Ragody, to produce 'comforts' for the troops, that the Society supported fund-raising events in Cardiff, and that it entertained French sailors who were passing through Cardiff.

In 1939 the Society had a substantial membership although smaller than in 1914. There was still a large French colony in Cardiff, with many established residents. The Society still had the house at 36 Park Place – now on lease – which it would retain until 1948. The Society ladies re-established the sewing circles, once again under the direction of Mme Ragody, but there are no records of more than one or two of the men serving in the forces. However, after the fall of France, men of the Free French forces became established in the Cardiff district, particularly the airmen of the Free French Air Force. These were befriended by the Society who gave them free access at all times to the Society's house. Many friendships were formed which lasted long into the post-war period.

Both of these sections of the *Centenary History* were written by Arlette Ragody-Hughes. She was well-qualified to do so. Her parents had been leading members of the support activities in both wars, and Arlette herself – she was aged 19 in 1940 – had very clear recollections of the second war and of the many Free French who came to the Society or to the Ragody home.

After Arlette's death in 2016, a hand-written copy of the text of a talk on the subject of the Free French in Cardiff was found in her papers. The existence of this text, and indeed the fact that such a talk had been given, was news to the Society. This talk contains far more detail and personal memories than were given in the *Centenary History*. Hence the decision was taken to publish it as a further instalment in the history of the Society.

Like all of Arlette's work, it was meticulously prepared. I have applied minimal editing to the text, such as correcting the spelling of one or two names. No title for the talk appears on the manuscript, so I have added a title reflecting the idea that the talk was largely based on Arlette's own memories. I have also added some illustrations, using photographs and other material from the Ragody family archives.

We do not know exactly when the talk was given, but it definitely dates from 1995-97. It was not given to the Society; there is no record of it in the Society's programmes and, in any case, it was written in English. Arlette's children have suggested that it was given to a women's group in Rhydypenau at the request of Nancy Jordan, a good friend of Arlette and also President of the Society.

John Martin, April 2021

Introduction

Firstly, let me tell you it's because I couldn't say "No" to my dear friend Nancy, when she invited me to come and talk to you, that I am here today. She asked me to speak to you about my family's involvement with the Free French during the war and this was in conjunction with the Cardiff Anglo-French Society. At this point let me tell you that Nancy is a past President of the Anglo-French Society. You may not realise this as she hides her light under a bushel.

I shall give you a brief rundown of myself. My parents were both French and lived in Cardiff since 1912. My father was the director of a French coal exporting and pit-wood importing company, and the office was at the docks. He belonged to the Anglo-French Society and was President in 1912. Incidentally the Society was founded in 1906. My mother was also an active member and at the outbreak of World War I organised the Cardiff branch of the London French Red Cross. Through fund-raising activities and a sewing party this branch sent an ambulance and "comforts" to the troops in the trenches. At the outbreak of World War 2 she once again presided over the same organisation. On both occasions, the Committees were run from the premises of the Anglo-French Society, i.e., 36 Park Place.

This is not going to be a history lesson but let me remind you that from September 3 1939 till spring 1940 we had a "phoney war". Then the Germans launched a vicious attack on the Western front invading Belgium and breaking through the Allied defences in May 1940. From then on, our Army was overcome and the Air Force proved insufficient. France collapsed and the Germans rapidly reached Normandy, then Brittany, and ultimately occupied the whole of the Atlantic coast. There was complete chaos on the roads with refugees being dive-bombed, adding to the confusion of the retreating forces. The French President was Mon. Lebrun and he wanted General Petain to form a new government. The previous one, under Paul Reynaud, had fallen. Petain was the hero of the First World War, was very esteemed but very old. Within days he agreed to complete capitulation and ultimately signed an armistice. Two-thirds of France was occupied from Dunkirk all along the coast to Hendaye at the Spanish frontier. France was roughly divided in two with a line going from the Atlantic coast through Vichy in the centre of the country. South of this line was an unoccupied zone – temporarily. Later the whole of France was occupied.

This is just a potted account of those few historical and tragic days of June 1940 but they will enable you to better appreciate the story of the Free French whom we came into contact with. During this dreadful period my parents were listening to the radio and trying to unravel the tangle of events. From one day to another we found we were cut off from any contact with France. Because of the separate armistice which Petain had signed we were no longer Allies but became Enemy Aliens. Consequently, Father's bank account was blocked and we had to submit to a curfew. Father was bewildered and could not understand how Petain could act in such a despicable and treacherous manner. It was difficult for him to appreciate, from the distance of this country, the fate of the refugees – there were Belgians, Poles and French in the exodus on the roads, in the trains and coastal ships, all moving south. Then, on June 18 1940, Gen. de Gaulle broadcast his famous appeal from the BBC in London. He invited all French citizens who could not accept defeat to rally to him in Great Britain, in whatever capacity. He declared "France has lost a battle but has not lost the war." She still had her colonies and her fleet.

My father soon understood that this unknown French general wanted France to continue to fight alongside the Allies. When she would be freed from the German yoke there would be Frenchmen from outside France alongside the liberating Allied armies. He immediately offered his services to de Gaulle, as a civilian. He was too old to fight and, a few days after the broadcast, a friend of my father's, who was also a docksman and a reserve Squadron Leader at St Athan RAF station, rang him to say that some members of the French armed forces had arrived at St Athan. It was decided that he, Squadron Leader Tregelles Edwards, should bring some of these men to the French Society so that my father could speak with them, learn how they'd escaped, what was happening in France, etc. Shortly afterwards Gen. de Gaulle was recognised by Churchill as the legitimate representative and leader of those French who were still at war and not accepting the armistice and refusing to collaborate with

Petain who was now a puppet manipulated by the Germans. I must mention that at this stage de Gaulle was declared a traitor to France and all those who rallied to him were traitors and would be subjected to capital punishment if caught.

After de Gaulle had been recognised officially, we, the French civilians in Great Britain, became “Friendly Aliens” and were no longer Enemy Aliens! So, having put you briefly in the picture and explained how we, as a family, became involved with the Free French in St Athan by virtue of being French citizens and members of the French Society, I shall give you some details concerning a number of those we have known.

To return to the initial meeting with some of these Free French brought to the Society by Squadron Leader Edwards, other meetings were organised. Some of the members offered to become war-time Godmothers to these young men and thus give them a “home”. If one hasn’t a family, no news of one’s near and dear, life is sad and hard. Later de Gaulle negotiated terms of engagement with Churchill so his Free French volunteers were paid. They arrived here with what they stood up in. When on leave, later on, in their adopted families, they brought ration coupons with them plus extra coupons from their friends who were issued with them but had nowhere to go on leave. Those who had been “adopted” were fortunate.

Free French Airmen

Right from the start our house was opened to any Free French. These first companions of de Gaulle formed the FFL (Forces françaises libres). More than one hundred came through our house. My father said, “I’m too old to fight so I must help those who can, in order to liberate Europe and France from the German scourge.”

Now amongst the young men at St Athan was the whole of the Pilot Training School No. 23 from Morlaix (N Brittany). The officer in charge, realising that the Germans were advancing rapidly into Brittany and because all lines of communication had been cut, took it upon himself to escape. He put it to his young airmen and they agreed to follow him. In total, the “school” consisted of 108 officers and men plus one padre. He was able to negotiate with the skipper of a tuna ship “Le Tréboulistе” and they left Brittany on June 19 1940 (the day following de Gaulle’s appeal). The ship arrived at Newlyn, Cornwall, having run the gauntlet of the Germans. From there it was directed to Falmouth where a very warm welcome was given them. From Falmouth, their destination was Trentham Park near Stoke-on-Trent. By June 27 they were at St Athan RAF station. So, at St Athan was grouped a real mix of the Free French Armed Forces – all ranks from all corners of France. Other Free French were based at other camps in Great Britain. There were Foreign legion men from the battle of Narvik still here.

For our part, we personally “adopted” three of those who came on that first visit to the Anglo-French Society. Their names I shall abbreviate to Robert, Julian and Bernard. We literally invited “you, you and you” to visit us from St Athan. Most of the initial group of Free French were based there till November 1940. It must be remembered that those who were airmen had to learn English before they could be sent to Flying School.

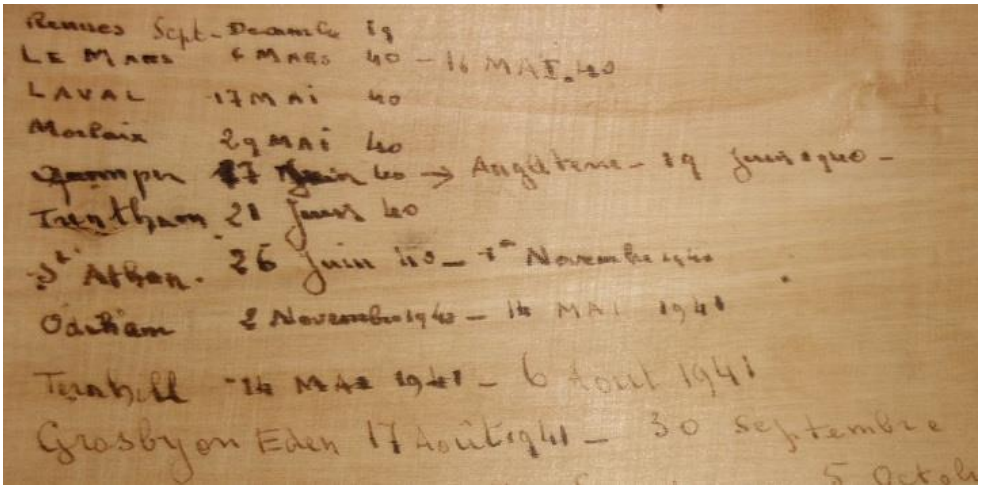
Robert

Let me tell you about Robert. He came with the Morlaix Flying School just mentioned. He was 23, married with a baby on the way. He frequently visited us during those difficult months and always called my mother “Marraine” – Godmother. He then went through the sequence of British flying schools ending up in Crosby-on-Eden, obtaining his “wings” in September 1941. He then flew Spitfires in a British Squadron, No. 79. Then he was in Squadron 87 at Colerne and later in Squadron 118 at Ibsley in February 1942. Later that same month he was shot down over France, captured, and sent to an Oflag in Germany. Through the Red Cross he made contact with us and we were able to write and send him parcels. Liberated at the end of the war in Europe in May 1945 he returned to Great Britain and came to see us before returning on leave to his native Paris. He was so happy at the thought of being reunited with his wife and son born after he’d left France. To his shock and dismay he found he’d been replaced. In despair, he volunteered for service in Indo-China where France was at war with the Indo-Chinese. Again, he was reported missing but this time no trace of him was found in

spite of innumerable searches. His mother wrote to us until her death in the 1960s. I still have his trunk in the lid of which he'd written the names and dates of the eight RAF stations he'd been attached to before being shot down. Having named us next of kin it had been forwarded to us from RAF Ibsley.

Robert's trunk

(Photo: Ragody Family Archives)



Robert's trunk

Interior of lid, showing part of the list of stations where Robert was posted: Rennes, Le Mans, Laval, Morlaix, and Quimper in France between September 1939 and 19 June 1940; Trentham, St Athan, Odiham, Ternhill, and Crosby-on-Eden between 21 June 1940 and 30 September 1941. (Photo: Ragody Family Archives. Please note that the Ragody Family Archives are now held at the Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington.)

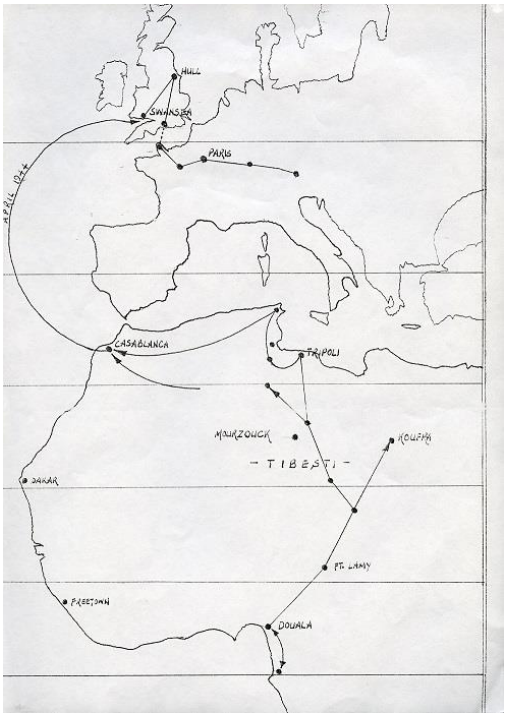
Julian

Julian was the second "Godson" who came with Robert with the Morlaix Flying School. He followed similar training to Robert to become a Spitfire pilot. Unfortunately, he had a flying accident whilst doing so and was killed near Chester. He was just 20. After the war, we were in touch with his mother (his father had died before the war) and she and her remaining son who was a monk visited us. They went to Chester to exhume Julian's remains and have him re-buried in France. Unfortunately, a number of these young pilots were killed in training accidents; no doubt being trained too quickly.

Bernard

Bernard was a regular army officer and he reached Great Britain from St Jean de Luz in SW France (near the Spanish frontier) on a Polish ship, the Sobiesky. After a short spell at St Athan, in August 1940 he was sent to Aldershot, then he was sent to Liverpool where he joined a convoy of British and French ships – for an unknown destination. This flotilla consisted of half a dozen ships, plus the Ark Royal [an aircraft-carrier], plus one cruiser and two escort vessels. They made a detour into the Atlantic and then made for Dakar in French Senegal, in an endeavour to secure the colony for the Allies, reaching Dakar on 22 September 1940. Unfortunately, the governor had been replaced by a pro-Vichy one. Two Lysander aircraft took off from Ark Royal on September 23. On board were representatives of de Gaulle but on landing they were made prisoners. The British and French decided to call it a day as they did not want a battle so the mission was an aborted one.

The expedition moved on to Freetown (British) to refuel and on to Douala in French Cameroon. At this stage, a number of French colonies in West and central Africa rallied to de Gaulle so the expeditionary force was very welcome there. Needless to say, we were without news of Bernard from October 1 1940 until September 11 1941. The October letter was written at sea between Dakar and Douala. The September 1941 news was a telegram from Chad. Chad was the first colony to rally to de Gaulle. The governor was Felix Eboué, a very well-educated native man. The Free French from the expeditionary force together with colonial detachments from Cameroon reached Fort Lamy (Chad capital) and were placed under the command of Gen. Leclerc. This general had been a prisoner of the Germans twice but had escaped to Gibraltar and thence to Great Britain. They formed the “Regiment de Marche du Tchad”. They were poorly equipped but were men of determination, tough, and had a brilliant leader. The regiment included a Camel Corps used for reconnoitring and became legendary, performing extraordinary feats. They captured Kufra, and Murzuk, on another occasion. They covered thousands of kilometres under dreadful conditions – heat, desert, suffered from thirst, crossed mountains. (MAP)



Map of Bernard’s wartime campaigns
(Picture: Ragody Family Archives)

Bernard Guerritte
(Photo: Ragody Family Archives)

[A complete biography of Bernard Gueritte can be found on the web site www.gueritte.org/bgu/bg.html.]

Eventually they conquered the Fezzan and reached Tripolitania. Murzuk and Kufra were station outposts in south Libya and it was imperative to keep the desert routes open to Sudan and Egypt. These places linked up to Cameroon and hence the Atlantic. In Tripoli, they joined Montgomery's 8th army and liberated Tunis. From there it was Algeria and then Morocco. 1942-43. They retrained in Morocco for almost one year. Their depleted numbers having by now increased to 20,000 men who had joined from everywhere. They were named "La Deuxième Division Blindée" - La D.B.!! - and were immortalised. In May 1944 as I was returning home from town I saw some tanks coming down Tydraw Road (opposite Roath Park). I'd lived there since 1937 and I still live there. I recognised the Cross of Lorraine – the Free French emblem – on the sides of the tanks and the French officers' peaked caps as they stood in their turrets. I arrived home like a whirlwind. My mother and I were very excited at the sight of this motorised division, which we guessed was the Division Blindée of Gen. Leclerc. Later we learned that part of this famous division had landed in Liverpool, the remainder in Wales.

They were the first to enter Paris and, after hard fighting, liberated Strasbourg, and then went on to Berchtesgaden. Bernard, being a regular army officer, now a Captain, was sent to Indochina after the end of the war in Europe. We were still fighting to retain that territory and prevent the communists taking over. After a brief spell Bernard returned to France in 1947 and came to see us to thank us for the letters and parcels sent to him during his years in Central Africa. Few of these seem to have reached him. The "deep" must have had the benefit of most! Eventually and inevitably we lost touch.

Forty-five years after the Normandy landings when commemorations were taking place, I was sorting out "memorabilia" and found the war-time letters from Bernard. They were now historical and so "on spec" I wrote to his home address in Troyes (SW of Paris). Miraculously I received a per return letter and a phone call. He was living close by and his letter had been forwarded. Being now in touch again, we were able to enjoy a joyful reunion in his home in 1995, i.e., fifty years after our initial meeting at 36 Park Place. He and his wife entertained us right royally for two days. They are visiting us here next month. So, these are the stories of the three Godsons.

Les Amis des Voluntaires Français

I mentioned earlier how my mother ran the Cardiff Committee of the French Red Cross during World War I and did likewise in the Second World War. At the collapse of France, this committee could not continue as such but became "Les Amis des Voluntaires Français" (AVF - Friends of Free France). She had a team of ladies from the French Society as well as other volunteers. As in 1914 the meetings took place at 36 Park Place. Amongst the first volunteers of de Gaulle based at St Athan was Lt. Christian Fouchet, older than the majority and a very erudite man. Whilst based at St Athan he gave the members of the Society a couple of interesting lectures. He became a minister in de Gaulle's post-war government. He wrote a book "At the Service of Gen. de Gaulle". Through his intermediary contact was made with the lady representative of de Gaulle in Detroit, USA. During the whole of the war this lady managed to forward to the AVF masses of wool (khaki, navy and grey) and bales of striped material (blue and brown) for pyjamas. (SAMPLE HERE)

Until Pearl Harbour these parcels arrived via Canada. I don't know how she obtained the funding. So, the ladies of the "workshop" knitted and sewed hundreds of garments which were then forwarded to Carlton Gardens, London, headquarters of Gen. de Gaulle. I remember cutting out these pyjamas on our dining-room table until my fingers ached!

[For the work of sewing circle of the AVF, Mme Ragody received letters of thanks from Gen. de Gaulle and Mme de Gaulle, which are still in the possession of the Ragody family. The letter from Gen. de Gaulle was reproduced in the *Centenary History*.]

Bring and Buy teas, flag days, raffles were organised to raise funds for the FFL. A flag was embroidered by the Royal School of Needlework, the design having been chosen by de Gaulle and paid for by the AVF. It was presented at the Reardon-Smith lecture theatre [in the

National Museum in Cardiff] to General Flipo who accepted it on behalf of de Gaulle. Later it was presented to the Second Motorised Division of Gen. Leclerc (just mentioned). Here is the flag of the AVF.

Presentation of AVF Flag to General Flipo, September 1944

JD/AW

REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE

Liberté · Egalité · Fraternité

MISSION MILITAIRE FRANCAISE
auprès des
GOUVERNEMENTS ALLIES [redacted] EN GRANDE-BRETAGNE

Attaché Militaire

3, St. James Square,
LONDON, S.W.1

14th, September 1944.

Nº 4Ub /GAL

Dear Madam Ragody,

I cannot wait any longer to thank you once again from the bottom of my heart for the magnificent standard presented by the Ladies Sub-Committee to the 1st Motorised Infantry Division. When they see it floating at the head of their battalions, they will remember the blood shed by the proud Welsh regiments on the battlefields of France.

Will you please thank, on my behalf, all the members of the Ladies Sub-Commitee, for all the delicacy and kind attention, of which the French wounded spoke to me so gratefully, when I visited WHITCHURCH Hospital.

With renewed thanks, believe me,

Yours very Sincerely.

Brigadier-General J. FLIPO

Madame RAGODY,
President of the Ladies Sub-
Committee, Friends of Free France;
CARDIFF.

LE CHEF DE LA MISSION

Letter of thanks from Gen. J Flipo, September 1944

(Photo and picture: Ragody Family Archives)

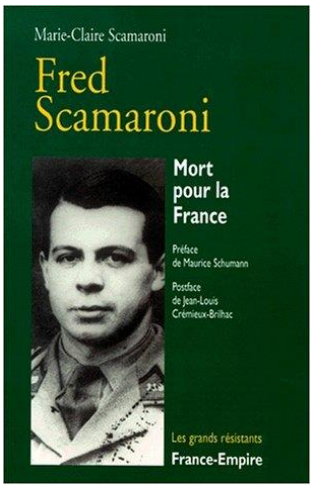
Now, I'll tell you about other Free French we met during this momentous period.

Fred Scamaroni

Fred Scamaroni was of Corsican extraction and we met him at the French Society at the same time as we met Bernard (just mentioned). They escaped together on the Polish vessel Sobiesky and he also went to Dakar with Bernard. I mentioned previously that two Lysander aircraft took off from the Ark Royal and landed at Dakar Airfield. They carried the official representatives of de Gaulle and he was one of them. I told you that they had been made prisoners. He managed to jump off the train transferring him to another part of the country, but was recaptured. This, remember, was September/October 1940. Later in 1940, he was transferred to a prison in Algiers and was ill. Eventually he was sent back to Vichy France (November 1940) to Clermont Ferrand. In December, he was transferred from prison to a military hospital and then released in some swap of prisoners. The authorities wanted him to sign a document to the effect that de Gaulle was a traitor. He refused to do so. Consequently, he could not be given a job. He did become a very minor "pen pusher" in Civil Service, a far cry from being a Prefect (he was youngest Prefect of France). He earned barely enough to feed himself but this job enabled him to move around and make contacts in the underground.

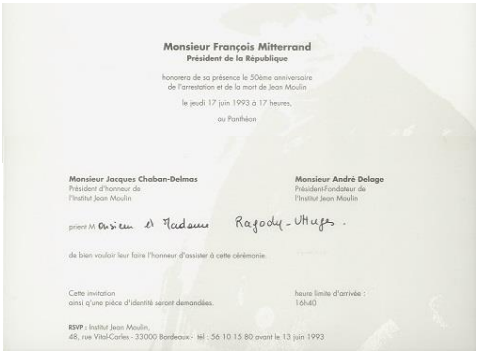
He returned to Great Britain through the Resistance via Brittany, having firstly had to cross the demarcation line between occupied and unoccupied France. A small ship came from England to pick him and a couple of others up. This was now Christmas 1941 – over one year after being in prison in Africa. He joined SOE (Special Operations Executive) and had special training in Scotland. Then he went to Corsica by submarine to organise the unification of the Resistance movements there. He'd calculated that this is where he'd be most useful, as it was sure to be the first part of France liberated by the Allies coming from N Africa and it was "home territory". After landing in Corsica in November 1942 he made contacts and started organising the networks of resistance movements. In March 1943, he was picked up by the ORVA (Italian Gestapo). Interrogated and tortured on consecutive days, he was afraid of giving in and committed suicide in his cell. He did not give away the names of his friends in the Resistance. He was 29 when he cut his wrist with a wire found in the cell.

You are probably wondering how I discovered all this. In 1988, one of our daughters on holiday in Corsica found a monument in his memory in Ajaccio, also an avenue named after him and a ship which plied between Marseilles and Ajaccio the "F. Scamaroni". As a result of her description of this beautiful island, we went there on holiday 1989. I took with me some photocopies of letters written by him, to us, before the Dakar episode. Some were written in England, after leaving St Athan, one on Ark Royal note paper at sea.



The very mention of his name to all and sundry and one realised that he was a hero of the Resistance. I was able to obtain his sister's address in Paris and wrote to her on returning home – not knowing if she was still alive or even at this address. Per return she rang me up, in tears. Here was someone who had known her brother in exile. Later that year we met in Paris and I gave her the original letters (I kept photocopies). They are now in the Museum of the "Order de la Libération" in a showcase devoted to Fred. The Museum is in the Invalides – where Napoleon is buried. This decoration, Ordre de la Libération, was instituted by de Gaulle and given to the Free French who performed outstanding feats of bravery. It ceased to be presented with the end of the war – understandably! Marie Claire, his sister, is a lawyer and writer and a member of the European Parliament. She gave me a book she'd written about Fred and only wished she had the letters in time to include them in it. She was also in the Resistance.

In 1993, Marie Claire invited us to ceremonies in Paris commemorating de Gaulle's appeal to the French (18 June 1940) and the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Jean Moulin. Jean Moulin was also a Prefect and, after escaping to Great Britain, returned to France as representative of de Gaulle, with the mission of organising the unification of all the Resistance movements. He was a friend of Fred's before the war. He was caught and tortured and died in the train transporting him to a camp in Germany. This was June 1943, three months after Fred's death.


Monsieur François Mitterrand
Président de la République

honorera de sa présence le 50ème anniversaire de l'arrestation et de la mort de Jean Moulin

le jeudi 17 juin 1993 à 17 heures,

au Panthéon

Monsieur Jacques Chaban-Delmas
Président d'honneur de l'Institut Jean Moulin

Monsieur André Delage
Président-Fondateur de l'Institut Jean Moulin

prient M. Docteur et Madame Ragody-Uhugs.

de bien vouloir leur faire l'honneur d'assister à cette cérémonie.

Cette invitation ainsi qu'une pièce d'identité seront demandées.

heure limite d'arrivée : 16h40

RSVP : Institut Jean Moulin, 48, rue Vital-Carles - 33000 Bordeaux - tél : 56 10 15 80 avant le 13 juin 1993


Jacques Chirac
Maire de Paris, Ville Compagnon de la Libération

prie Madame Marie-Claire SCAMARONI

de bien vouloir assister au déjeuner qui sera donné dans les salons de l'Hôtel de Ville le Vendredi 18 Juin 1993, à 12 heures précises en l'honneur des Compagnons de la Libération à l'occasion du 53e anniversaire de l'Appel Historique du 18 Juin 1940

Cette invitation devra pouvoir être présentée à l'entrée

Accès : 3, rue de Lobau, Paris 4e

Invitation from President Mitterand

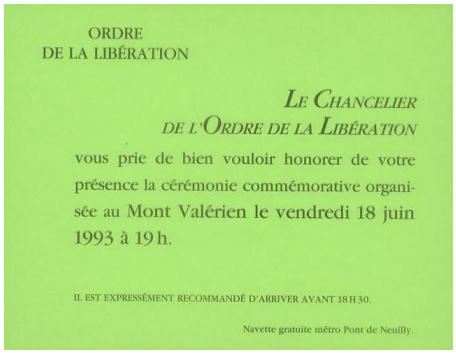
Invitation from Jacques Chirac Maire de Paris

So, we accepted the invitation to these ceremonies and visited the Pantheon where Jean Moulin is buried. This building has the shape of a Greek temple and is an ex-church and the sepulchre of famous Frenchmen. The French President attended a very moving ceremony. The Army Choir sang a famous resistance hymn "Les Partisans" – the tune is evocative and people were in tears. In the afternoon, we went to the gardens of the Invalides where the Museum (O de la L), just mentioned, is. A reception was held and included famous guests such as Philippe de Gaulle (son), the widow of Gen. Leclerc of the armoured division I've talked about, and General Boisseau, son-in-law of de Gaulle.


1993

53e ANNIVERSAIRE DE L'APPEL DU 18 JUIN

FAMILLES DE COMPAGNONS


ORDRE DE LA LIBÉRATION

LE CHANCELIER DE L'ORDRE DE LA LIBÉRATION

vous prie de bien vouloir honorer de votre présence la cérémonie commémorative organisée au Mont Valérien le vendredi 18 juin 1993 à 19 h.

IL EST EXPRESSÉMENT RECOMMANDÉ D'ARRIVER AVANT 18 H 30.

Navette gratuite métro Pont de Neuilly.

Invitation from L'Ordre de la Libération to the ceremony at Mont Valérien

(Pictures of the four invitations above: Ragody Family Archives)

The following day we had lunch at the Hotel de Ville (City Hall of Paris) as guests of the Mayor of Paris who was Jacques Chirac – today's President. The rooms were sumptuously decorated. We were approximately 300. In the evening, we drove to the Mont-Valérien just outside Paris. At the base of this Mont (hill) is a huge and magnificent monument to the Martyrs of the Resistance. There is a chapel cut into the hill where unknown victims of all colours and creeds are buried – 16 of them. On the summit of the hill is a fort to which members of the resistance were brought and shot by the Germans – hence the memorial. All the VIPs of the Armed Forces were there. By invitation only, one was allocated a place in a designated area to stand in. The Hymn of the Partisans was played, not sung as in the Pantheon the previous day. De Gaulle's recorded voice was heard reading his appeal of June 18 1940. The President of France had previously arrived by helicopter from above the trees.

Not a word was spoken except for de Gaulle's voice. Thus it is every year, a silent ceremony but for one voice and one hymn played.

Once in active service the Free French took on pseudonyms in case of being made prisoners of the Germans or Italians. So, our house became a "letter box". As training progressed and camps changed so did addresses. Any letters (rarely) received would be re-forwarded by Father. Very occasional news came via USA, Red Cross, Portugal. Meanwhile our Free French friends wrote to us and Dad classified all letters in shoe boxes in order to return them to their families in event of death. These letters described life in exile in Great Britain, their sentiments concerning their duty and love of country and family. Unfortunately, many young lives were lost and Dad was able to communicate with families and give them letters after war.

Raymond Fassin

One of our friends was Lt. Raymond Fassin, who had only been married three months when he arrived at St Athan. He left the camp for London – head-quarters of de Gaulle at Carlton Gardens. He wrote from time to time (I have these letters) then he disappeared from view. At the end of hostilities, we learnt that he had been sent into France in the Resistance to organise the Northern Sector. He met his wife briefly, who was also in the Resistance. It was too dangerous for them to be together for long. Eventually he was caught by the Germans and deported. He died in the camp but a few weeks before its liberation.

At the ceremony which we attended at the Invalides Museum, we were introduced by Marie Claire (Fred's sister) to a couple – we were her English friends!! It transpired they'd spent their honeymoon in Great Britain so they asked us where we lived. At the mention of Cardiff, she took me a little to one side, she said "My first husband was at a camp near Cardiff." Asking her where, her reply was St Athan. Then I enquired for husband's name – it was Lt. Raymond Fassin. Declaring that I'd known him, she immediately asked "Are you a member of the Ragody family?" Answering that I was their daughter, the husband, Commandant Rivière, nearly fainted. He literally changed colour and repeated twice – but it's not possible, it's not possible. He had been Raymond's second in command in the Resistance and they were best friends. Later I photocopied letters we had from Raymond and also one from her after the war. Perhaps you are able to realise what those two commemorative days in Paris, with Marie Claire Scamaroni, meant to us. They were incredible in every way and we were very privileged in being invited to participate.

Bernard Lefebvre

Also known, whilst at St Athan, was Bernard Lefebvre who came out of France from St Jean de Luz on a Polish ship, the Batory. He infiltrated a group of Polish airmen to get on board. Aged 33 he was older than most and from Rouen. He was a professional photographer and had collaborated with a French professor of physics in designing a vehicle headlight cover. This made rays of light invisible from the air. The appropriate contacts were made through us acting as interpreter and the project was presented to the Patents Office. Unfortunately, I can't remember the outcome. On leaving St Athan he wrote to us and was eventually at Dakar and then was sent to Brazzaville and French Cameroon. From there he went to Chad and the Fezzan. He was one of the official photographers, on land and in the air. He sent us photos from these areas which I have kept previously. On returning to Rouen after the war he wrote a few times and then correspondence stopped.

In 1984, forty years after D-Day, he wrote to me and Mrs Ragody at our address in the hope that someone was still around. I replied per return. On the postcard was written "in gratitude

and in commemoration". In 1987, we were invited to visit him in Rouen where he lived in a beautiful family home which had withstood the bombings. The ground floor of this building was his business premises, workshop and studio. He had been responsible for photographing the reconstruction of Rouen cathedral. He was proud to show us his Ikoflex camera which had journeyed from St Jean de Luz to Cameroon, the Fezzan, and back to Rouen. He was writing a book "With de Gaulle in Africa" and gave me a "rough copy". In 1990, it was published and he sent me a copy – Voici!! Inside the cover are copies of addressed envelopes one of which has my father's writing and another mine. On pp 22-23 he mentions our family and some of the French Society's members. He was adopted by a French member and mentions her. Sadly, he died in 1992.

Cover of book by Bernard Lefebvre

(Pictures of covers of books by Lefebvre and by M-C Scamaroni: Ragody Family Archives)

(Photos (above) of Raymond Fassin and Bernard Lefebvre: Ragody Family Archives)

Other Free French Airmen

Yet another Free French who came through the house was one from the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He designed the wings of the FAFL worn by pilots. Miniature ones were made as gifts. He drew one for me in my autograph book. Here are the badges.

Sketch of design for FFAL pilot's wings by Jacques Drabier

(Source: Arlette Ragody-Hughes' autograph book)

On one occasion, incendiary bombs were dropped along the length of Roath Park. A Free French pilot on leave with us went to help extinguish them but at night the park gates were locked. He returned soaking wet, having climbed over the railings and obtained water from the stream. Later on, railings and gates, including the ones from the houses, were removed for metal for the war effort. This pilot was later killed but he had left his Free French wings to my mother. She was able after the war to trace his sister, now moved in Belgium. His parents had died. My mother felt that, although left to her, they belonged to his family, and so they were returned.

After the defeat of Rommel in N Africa by the Allies, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia were freed. This was 1943. Blockaded in Algeria since June 1940 were French airmen. They had escaped from France at its collapse and then "got stuck" there until N Africa got liberated. In the autumn of 1943, a number of them came to Great Britain for training and some of them were based for a time at St Athan. Invited by the Overseas League they were entertained there one evening. It happened that I was there and it transpired that the officer in charge was from the same part of France as was my family and where I was born (like Penarth and Cardiff!) He was Lt. A. Rousseau, a Flight Engineer. Subsequently he spent much of his spare time at our house and left St Athan with his men in January 1944 for Yorkshire. That part of their training having been completed, they were posted to Bomber Command in Yorkshire at RAF Elvington. They became members of two separate French squadrons – Tunisie and Guyenne, manned entirely by French airmen, even the ground crew. These squadrons took part in the bombing of the Ruhr and the "softening up" for the D-Day landings.

Every few weeks Albert would come on leave. Leave was frequent as life was exacting and these men were under tremendous strain. However, the "job" was never discussed. Daily crews went missing, shot down. With hind-sight one realises how difficult it must have been when, on occasion, these crews had to bomb their own country. Fifty per cent of the crew members never returned. Albert did survive even though he volunteered for extra operations, completing 34 sorties over Germany. His daughter was born whilst he was in Great Britain. His wife was in Algeria. He was awarded the DFC and a couple of French decorations.

In June 1946, we French civilians in Great Britain were allowed to travel back to France. In Paris, we visited Albert's home and met his wife and family. Then we visited our own family in Nantes and Rochefort, near La Rochelle, in Western France, and a number of friends, returning to Cardiff after an absence of one month. Two weeks later, on July 14 – France's National Day – Albert was on a plane taking off from a base in the South of France when it "pancaked" and all crew members were killed. They were due to participate in a "flyover" above the Arc de Triomphe. The shock was terrible – he was 29. His wife remained in touch with us. Long after, in 1986, she and daughter came to stay with us in Cardiff. We took them to St Athan and Porthcawl on a pilgrimage. An airbase in Central France is named "La Base Albert Rousseau" after him.

RAF Elvington

An Association of ex-members of the two French Bomber Squadrons has been formed and the Yorkshire Air Museum [at Elvington] has been created. Every other year the survivors come to the Yorkshire Air Museum and to York Abbey for the Battle of Britain commemorations. On September 1 1995 we were privileged to take part in the ceremonies, which included the unveiling of a Mirage plane donated by France. A Halifax bomber has been reconstructed and is in the Yorkshire Air Museum. It had to be built from scratch from pieces rescued from as far as Norway, not one plane having been kept. In the village of Elvington is a memorial to the two French Squadrons. During these couple of days in Yorkshire I re-met Free French not seen since the end of the war. The York Minster service was most moving, the Minster being filled to capacity, invitation having to be shown to enter.

Commemorative Plaque at 36 Park Place

These jottings are the memories of my parents' and my own involvement with the Free French through the Anglo-French Society in the dark days of the summer of 1940 and on until the end of the war. Since then I have continued or renewed contact with some of the survivors

and some of the families of those who never returned. Each year the numbers are inevitably depleted. In 1995, fifty years after the cessation of hostilities, when remembrance ceremonies and services were taking place everywhere, it occurred to me that the French Society should also participate. Consequently, in April 1995 a plaque was placed on the wall of 36 Park Place and was unveiled by the Lord Mayor. The Standard Bearer of the Free French Association in London came with his flag. The local press was present and mention made, through an interview on “Good Morning Wales”.

Unveiling commemorative plaque outside 36 Park Place on 5 April 1999

(Photo: Cardiff French Society Archives)

The inscription reads as follows:

> 5 APRIL 1995
>
> THIS PLAQUE WAS PRESENTED BY
> THE SOCIÉTÉ FRANCO-ANGLAISE de CARDIFF
> WHO OCCUPIED THIS BUILDING FROM 1911 - 1948
> IN MEMORY OF THE FREE FRENCH FORCES
> WELCOMED HERE DURING WORLD WAR II.

I started my talk with an emphasis on 36 Park Place and I finalise it by pin-pointing it again. If you are in that area, do look at this plaque on the wall by the flight of steps on the left of the building, which is now a Midland Bank. [Since then, it has been converted into offices.] It is the second house from the corner of Museum Place, facing the Reardon-Smith Lecture Theatre.

Fin.

The Société Franco-Anglaise de Cardiff and the Free French 1940-45

2. Background to the Arrival of the Free French Air Force in South Wales

by John Martin

Introduction

In 2006, I was involved in writing and publishing the *Centenary History of the Société*. I was therefore aware of the activities of the Society during the Second World War in support of the Free French which were described in that History.

There have been two subsequent events which have led me to write this new section of history, on the background to the arrival of the Free French airmen at RAF St Athan.

The first is that, in 2013, I was contacted from France by the son of Raymond Fassin, one of the airmen who had been at St Athan in 1940 and had been befriended by the Ragody family. Fassin's son, François-René, had only recently become aware of his father's links with Cardiff. Raymond Fassin, in fact, had been well-known to the Society at the time and his name appears in the *Centenary History*.

François-René was interested in his father's time in Cardiff, at St Athan, and at other RAF bases in Britain during the war. He hoped to be able to do a tour of many of the bases and places which his father had spent time in. I therefore became involved in a certain amount of research into Cardiff and RAF St Athan at this period. It was planned that François-René should visit Cardiff to give a talk to the Society, and to visit RAF St Athan, the house at 36 Park Place, and other places connected with the Free French. Events, not least the 2020 pandemic, caused this visit to be postponed.

The second is that, following the death of Arlette Ragody-Hughes in 2016, the Society became aware of text of a talk which she had given on her recollections of this period of the Society's history. This gave a very much fuller account of the support given to the Free French, especially to the Free French airmen stationed at RAF St Athan, and included the personal stories of many of them.

Given the new material which had been uncovered, it was decided to publish a new volume in the History of the Society, covering the period of the Second World War. The first part in this volume is Arlette's talk, published in its entirety with additional illustrations. Following this, I thought it would be useful to add this background chapter on a number of points: the role of RAF St Athan and why it might have been chosen as the base for the Free French Air Force; how and when the Free French airmen came to St Athan; information from the archives from RAF St Athan and from the Ragody family which shed some further light on this story; and finally. references in the local and national press to these airmen and to relevant events, in other words, the public knowledge which would have been available to the members of the Society at the time.

At a later date, it is also planned to include a section based on the most interesting story of Raymond Fassin, who after his time at St Athan joined de Gaulle's secret operations unit, before parachuting into France in 1942 with Jean Moulin as a Resistance leader.

John Martin, April 2021

The Société Franco-Anglaise de Cardiff and the Free French 1940-45

Background to the Arrival of the Free French Air Force in South Wales

by John Martin

French Airmen Escape to Britain: June 1940

The Society got to know more than 100 French airmen in late June and early July of 1940. They heard from them their individual stories of how they had successfully escaped from France, stories full of danger, adventure, ingenuity, and luck – good or bad. Some of these are retold in Arlette's talk.

However, a more complete history of the early days of the Free French Air Force had to wait until after the war, when the many individual stories, recollections and memoirs could be brought together in a consistent and reliable narrative. There were many problems in reconciling the various dates and names in the different memoirs, and some uncertainties inevitably remain.

Fundamentally, there were three ways in which the French airmen who gathered at RAF St Athan in 1940 had found their way to Britain. Firstly, there was one group who made an improvised and risky crossing of the Channel on a fishing boat. Secondly, there were individuals and small groups who 'borrowed' planes from their bases and flew directly to Britain or to a British base such as Gibraltar. Thirdly, there were a number of individuals who left France in the evacuations carried out by the British and Polish governments between June 15 and 25 from the ports on the Atlantic coast.

1. Crossing the Channel by Boat

The group who crossed the Channel by boat were the largest group to travel together. Leaving France on June 19, these were the 108 officers and cadets of the Flying School based at Morlaix in Brittany, led by Lt. Edouard Pinot, who crossed the Channel in the fishing vessel Le Trébouliste. This event is described in detail in Arlette's talk. This group arrived at RAF St Athan on June 27.

2. Flying in 'Borrowed' Planes

An excellent history (in French) of the Free French Air Force from its first beginnings in 1940 to its final fusion with the regular French Air Force in 1945 can be found on the Internet at http://fandavion.free.fr/fafl.htm. In French, the name of the service is Forces aériennes françaises libres. The abbreviation is FAFL which I will use from now on. I have drawn on this history for many details of the first flights in June 1940.

Among the very first to arrive in England was a group of officers who were 'stowaways' in a RAF plane out of Bordeaux on June 17. One of these was Lt. Christian Fouchet who is mentioned in both the *Centenary History* and in Arlette's talk. He was a minister in de Gaulle's government after the war.

Another flight on June 17 was undertaken by a group comprised of Yves Ezanno, Albert Preziosi, Jacques Soufflet, Gaillet and Moizan. This flight was from Royan to Yeovil in a Caudron Simoun. Jacques Soufflet was another airman with a successful political career, becoming a minister under Prime Minister Jacques Chirac.

Another early flight in a French plane took place on the night of July 19/20 from the airfield of St Jean D'Angely. The plane was a Farman 222 heavy bomber piloted by James Denis. A Frenchman, despite his name, he went on to be a successful fighter pilot in the Battle of Britain. This well-documented flight was led by Captain Goumin; on board were nineteen

airmen and Mme Goumin. This plane was one of those to fly into RAF St Athan a few weeks later.

Two flights took place on the night of June 29/30. Rene Mouchotte, Charles Guerin and Henry Lafont (pilots), together with George Heldt (observer), Duval (gunner) and Lt. Andre Sorret (army), took a Caudron Goeland from their airbase at Oran. Two other pilots, Emille Fayolle and Hubert Sturm, took a Caudron Simoun. The two planes flew to Gibraltar. Leaving Gibraltar on July 3 on board the trawler President Houduce, Mouchotte and twenty colleagues arrived in England on July 13.

There were at least two flights from the airbase at Meknes in Morocco. On June 29, Jean-Marie Ganuchaud escaped in a Morane Saulnier, and on July 3 Emile Poizat and others flew to Gibraltar in a Caudron Goeland. Both Poizat and Ganuchard arrived later at RAF St Athan,

Flights in 'borrowed' planes continued on a regular basis over the next two months, bringing perhaps a further few dozen French airmen to Britain. Most of the planes involved were light aircraft. A few fighters were also flown across, including some which had taken part in the Battle of France. The Times (August 12) carried a report of General de Gaulle inspecting these fighters and their pilots 'somewhere in England'. Under the headlines "Ready to Fight Again" And "French Aircraft Repaired in this Country", the report described these 'American-built' planes as 'battle-scarred and bullet-ridden' after combat on the western front in France.

3. The Evacuation via the Atlantic Ports: Operation Ariel

Arlette's talk mentions three airmen – Bernard Guerritte, Fred Scamaroni and Bernard Lefebvre – who came to Britain on board the Polish ships Sobieski and Batory from St Jean-de-Luz. In fact, we have the names of others of the FAFL at RAF St Athan who also came from France on the Sobieski: Raymond Fassin, Pierre Clayeux, Charles Feuvrier, Bernard Fuchs, Paul Roquere, Joseph Bundervoet, Gerard Claron, Max Andre, Pierre Delange, and possibly more.

An intriguing question is why all these airmen came on the two *Polish* troopships when there many more – perhaps one hundred – British troopships engaged in this evacuation. A closer look at the details may help clarify this.

By June 13 it was clear that the Battle for France was lost, and it was decided without delay to evacuate as many of the British and Allied forces as possible. The British had in excess of 100,000 troops in France, Poland had two infantry divisions and a large air force, and the Czechs had considerable forces, including some 750 airmen,

The evacuation – under the codename Operation Ariel – involved a large number of British naval vessels, about 100 British troopships – converted liners and ferries – some requisitioned Dutch and Belgian ships, and the two Polish troopships (both ex-liners) mentioned above.

At the start of this period, remarkably, the two Polish ships were in fact carrying troops in the *opposite* direction. On June 13 the Sobieski and the Batory were sailing from the Clyde to Brest to return Polish and French troops from the Norwegian campaign to France. On arrival at Brest all plans were put into reverse. The French troops disembarked while the Polish troops stayed on board and more were loaded.

The rules of the evacuation were constantly changing. On June 16 Petain came to power and ordered all French troops to stay at their bases. The Armistice was signed on June 22 and this prohibited any French service personnel from leaving France. The armistice came into effect on June 25 and from that moment onwards the French were required to close all their ports. The whole evacuation became a race against time, with the evacuation ports increasingly thronged with refugees.

At all the ports the embarkation officers were under instructions as to whom to take on board. For the most part, the British tried to observe these rules and hence would not permit French

servicemen on British ships. The Poles, on the other hand, appear to have actively connived in helping the French airmen escape, to the extent of providing them with Polish uniforms so that they could slip on board more easily.

Most of the French airmen left from the port of St Jean-de-Luz near the Spanish border, which was the port used for the final evacuations – in scenes of great chaos on shore – up to the deadline of June 25. The final sailings of the Batory and the Sobieski took place on June 21 and they arrived in Plymouth on June 23.

There were, in addition, at least two French airmen at RAF St Athan – Rene Molinari and Claude Troupel – who escaped a few days earlier on a British ship, the SS Madura. This was a liner returning from India when it was ordered to proceed to the port of Le Verdon at the mouth of the Gironde estuary. Its mission was to bring back the British ambassador, Embassy staff, and an unspecified number of secret service agents. (It is interesting to speculate on how the embarkation officers were expected to identify the secret agents. "You tell me you are a spy. Can you prove that?") The Madura made two sailings, leaving Le Verdon on June 17 (with 180 embassy staff and 8000 refugees) and again on June 19.

The Admiralty Diary covering fifteen days of this operation, from June 13 to June 28, is available online (https://www.naval-history.net/xDKWDa-Aerial.htm) and makes fascinating reading. During this period troopships shuttled continuously between those Atlantic ports still accessible and Britain, carrying 1,000 to 9,000 people at a time, against a background of chaos in western France.

Fewer French airmen were evacuated during Operation Ariel than the British might have hoped for. On June 19 a message was received by the Admiralty that a group of 2000 French officers, troops and specialists were making for the Atlantic coast. The embarkation officers were ordered to "arrange evacuation, preferably in French ships." On June 20, two separate messages were received that a Polish division and "also 3000 French air pilots and mechanics" were assembling in the Bordeaux area. On June 23 a further message was received that 2500 French airmen and 750 experts were expected. These had still not appeared by June 24, the day before the deadline for evacuations laid down by the Armistice. In the early hours of June 25, the Commander-in-Chief sent a message to the Senior Naval Officer at St Jean-de-Luz, asking if the following groups had been embarked:

(a) Colonel Bonavita, 2000 French troops and skilled workmen.

(b) Mr. Delaraine and 20 R.D.F. technicians.

c) Captain Bichilone and 30 French Officers and officials.

(d) 750 French experts, 2000 Polish airmen and 20 Czechs.

(e) Number of Spanish personages.

(f) Colonel de Gaulles' party.

The reply, sent just before 9 am, is recorded as "none arrived. All French parties refused permission owing to armistice."

It appears that the total number of French airmen who took this evacuation route to England was probably no more than 200, perhaps fewer.

Taking all three routes together, the number of Free French airmen at the start of July 1940 was probably less than 400. Overall, the numbers of the Free French forces under de Gaulle – army, navy or air force – were very small. There were about 7,000 troops from the Norwegian campaign (out of 100,000) who chose to join de Gaulle rather than be repatriated to France. Thus, in terms of numbers, the Free French were much smaller than the other Allied forces in the UK, especially the Poles and the Czechs.

RAF St Athan

Nearly all members of the FAFL spent time at RAF St Athan and for many it was their home for at least the first few months of the war. In the next sections, I will describe what life on the base was like and try to answer the question as to why St Athan was chosen to house them in the first place.

RAF St Athan opened in 1938. It was one of twelve new airfields built in the 1930s on the western side of the country. These were believed to be beyond the range of enemy bombers, unlike the front-line stations on the eastern side. Their functions were largely support functions: training, storage and maintenance.

The first fact to note about RAF St Athan is that it was large. This can be seen from a report in The Times (July 27, 1938):

> BIGGEST RAF STATION
>
> NEW TECHNICAL SCHOOL FOR AIRMEN
>
> The new Royal Air Force school for technical training at St Athan, Glamorgan, will form on September 1. When completed this will be the biggest RAF station in the country. The station will cover over 900 acres … When the school opens in September about 1,000 airmen will be under training, and it is expected that this number will rise to 3,000 by December. The further expansion of the RAF calls for an entry of about 9,000 men … by the end of March … A large proportion of these 9,000 men will be trained at St Athan.
>
> The Times, July 27, 1938

RAF St Athan remained the largest RAF station throughout the war and for several years thereafter. Originally intended to have a complement of about 5,000, it grew rapidly to a maximum size of over 10,000.

The development of RAF St Athan is described in detail in the excellent booklet produced for its fiftieth anniversary (*Royal Air Force St Athan: 1938-1988* by S J Bond). The training units alone were enough to account for more than 5,000 of the personnel on site; at its peak, 500 trained flight crew and ground crew graduated from St Athan every week. In addition, there was a large Maintenance and Repair Unit, employing more than 400 men. Other units came over time; an RAF general hospital, a School of Motor Transport, a School of Air Navigation, and others.

The base had two camps, situated on either side of the airfield. West Camp housed the Maintenance and Repair Units. East Camp housed the Training Units and the Residential Areas. Both of these were large complexes of buildings. The Residential Area had accommodation for more than 5,000 personnel. It is here that the French Airmen were housed. The lay-out of the station can be clearly seen in the aerial reconnaissance photograph taken by the Luftwaffe in 1941.

Reconnaissance photograph of RAF St Athan taken by the Luftwaffe on October 21, 1941. The landing area is the dark space between the two complexes of buildings, carefully measured as 930 by 720 metres. No runways are visible. Originally, these would have been grass runways but were all later re-laid in concrete.

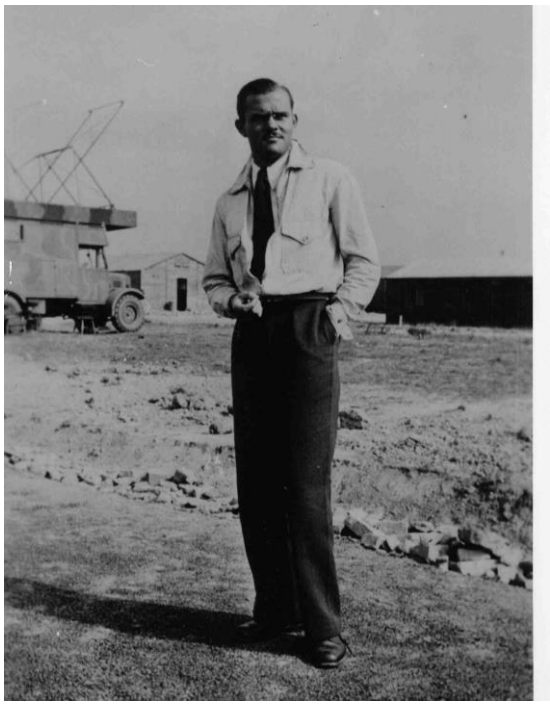
The lower complex of buildings (West Camp) is the Maintenance and Repair Unit. The upper complex (East Camp) comprises the Training Schools and the residential areas. This is where the Free French Air Force was based from 1940 onwards. (Photo: RAF St Athan archives)

In addition to the core of the base – the airfield, West Camp and East Camp - RAF St Athan extended far over the surrounding countryside. It had in fact been designated as one of the RAF's Aircraft Storage Units (ASU), where large numbers of aircraft could be received from the factories and prepared for service, and, when required, operational aircraft could be repaired or modified. Initially 300 aircraft were stored at RAF St Athan, but this number grew rapidly to more than 600. Virtually every type of aircraft in RAF service would have been seen in some numbers. For security reasons these aircraft were parked away from the main airfield in the surrounding fields. More and more parking bays and access tracks were constructed, and this network became so extensive that by the end of the war it was possible to taxi a plane all the way from RAF St Athan to RAF Llandow, three miles to the west. There was a constant turnover of aircraft, often more than 100 per month.

The size of RAF St Athan and its capacity to house thousands of personnel, changing on a weekly basis, suggest that this is the reason why it was chosen to accommodate the men of the Free French Air Force when they suddenly arrived in Britain in 1940. In the absence of any record to the contrary, I believe this is the most likely explanation.

In fact, the French were not the only Allied airmen to be sent to RAF St Athan. A group of Belgian airmen, who had been evacuated from Dunkirk, eventually arrived at RAF St Athan in mid-August. Altogether some 450 Belgian service personnel were evacuated from Dunkirk. They were sent to camp in Tenby in South Wales, from where a smaller number of airmen, about 25-30, were sent to RAF St Athan.

There are several photographs in the archives of RAF St Athan, which show the Belgian airmen and their new accommodation.



"1940 Belgian aircrew arriving at 4SofTT."

The abbreviation stands for No. 4 School of Technical Training, which was located in East Camp. (Photos: RAF St Athan archives)

“1940 St Athan East Camp.”

This picture shows the standard accommodation huts (wooden), with the construction of further huts in full flow. (Photo: RAF St Athan archives)

“1939 3Wg 4SoTT”

This picture, taken a year earlier, shows a group of the first intake of RAF trainee mechanics in front of one of their wooden accommodation huts, with evidence of further construction work in the background. (Photo: RAF St Athan archives)

“Barrack Room B17.”

This picture shows the spartan accommodation inside the wooden huts. No wonder the French airmen found the homes of the Society members a welcome change! (Photo: RAF St Athan archives)

There are no photographs in these archives of the French airmen, who arrived a few weeks earlier, towards the end of June 1940. However, they would have certainly been housed in similar accommodation.

Later in the war, RAF St Athan was used to house a training unit for Czech pilots. The original contingent of the Czech Air Force, numbering about 750, had arrived in Britain in June 1940 and many of them took part in the Battle of Britain. This means that they would have been based in the South-East of the country. However, in February 1942, an RAF Czechoslovakia Depot was established at RAF St Athan to train Czech pilots and flight crew for operational fighter and bomber units. The training was done by RAF staff, the initial courses being devoted to learning English. The complement of this unit was about 125 Czech airmen and 17 RAF instructors.

The FAFL Flies in to RAF St Athan

French airmen were arriving at RAF St Athan from late June onwards. The Morlaix Flying School – over 100 strong – arrived on June 27 and most of the airmen who arrived singly or in small groups spent at least a few days there. The aircraft which they had used to fly to Britain were initially scattered around the country. However, at some point, the decision was taken to arrange for a spectacular fly-in of these planes to RAF St Athan.

This event is described in the booklet by Bond (p27) through the eyewitness accounts of Ronald Liversuch and Eric How, who were serving on the station at the time. Bond does not give the date when this fly-in took place. From the number of planes involved, it was probably late July or early August.

I will give a short resume of these eyewitness accounts:

One morning the station received a message to expect a number of aircraft with French markings. Following standard procedure, an ambulance and several fire tenders were positioned on the tarmac next to the duty flight Hurricanes. After some time, the sound of approaching aircraft was heard. These circled the airfield, waiting for permission to land; when given the green light, they landed together and taxied in. The RAF airmen were amazed by the strange planes, which they described as 'giant string-bags.'

<table>
<tr><td>  </td><td>  </td><td>  </td></tr>
<tr><td>Caudron Goeland</td><td>Caudron Simoun</td><td>Farman 222</td></tr>
<tr><td>  </td><td>The Fly-In of the FAFL to RAF St Athan comprised about a dozen planes, of these five types.

(all photos: 1000aircraftphotos.com)</td><td>  </td></tr>
<tr><td>Dewoitine D520</td><td></td><td>Potez 63</td></tr>
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An even greater surprise awaited them when the airmen disembarked. "From these machines came as motley a mixture of uniforms as we had ever seen; they all looked like Admirals, or characters from grand opera, with long flowing capes, pill box hats and much gold braid."

It cannot be said that the French airmen lacked panache! Later it transpired that, amongst their personal effects aboard the aircraft, there were several barrels of wine. The station adjutant ordered that this should be 'disposed of'. It is hardly surprising that the two RAF airmen had such clear memories of that day, even 48 years later.

Vetting of New Arrivals

For security reasons, all new arrivals to Britain had to be vetted. This was to establish who they were, that they did not pose a security risk – there were many attempts to infiltrate spies – and to assess where they could be useful to the war effort.

The evacuations of June 1940 saw the arrival of many tens of thousands of foreign nationals, and this put great pressure on the vetting process. During Operational Ariel the embarkation officers were frequently reminded to check who they were loading, and just as often they replied that this was simply impossible. On many occasions, when they had suspicions about who was in fact embarking, they radioed back to Britain to advise that this or that shipload should be checked on arrival. On one occasion the message was “Polish force will require close scrutiny.” Perhaps they suspected that some of them were not in fact Poles.

The vetting continued when servicemen reached Britain, and it was essential that it was carried out in their native language. The majority of the French servicemen were vetted by staff of de Gaulle’s headquarters, except for the airmen, who were sent to RAF St Athan. Bond (p27) records that Monsieur and Madame Ragody were called in and that their help with the vetting was invaluable.

There was one particular aspect to the reception of French personnel that did not apply to the other nationalities. Rene Mouchotte, one of the most famous of the French fighter pilots, referred to this clearly in his diary. When Mouchotte and his colleagues landed at Gibraltar on June 30, they were – somewhat to their surprise – cheered and congratulated by the British troops. But this was followed by a stiff interrogation by two French officers. Once they were convinced by Mouchotte’s story, they relaxed. However, the senior officer then pointed out the serious nature of the choice that had been made:

"Mes enfants", dit-il. "Ce que vous avez fait là est d'autant plus beau qu'il a été difficile et périlleux. Vous vous êtes trouvés en face d'un des dilemmes les plus tragiques, où le cœur, la famille, les intérêts d'une vie tout entière peut-être, s'opposaient au devoir.”

(Mouchotte’s story is described in detail in a France 3 television programme and accompanying article published in September 2020 for the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, under the title *Seconde Guerre mondiale : comment René Mouchotte et une douzaine de Français ont pris part à la Bataille d'Angleterre.* Because of its extreme length, the URL is not given here but can be found in the list of references at the end,)

Incidentally, it was only during this interview that Mouchotte became aware that General de Gaulle was the leader of the Free French. This had been head-line news in Britain for more than ten days but had been suppressed by the Vichy regime, particularly in North Africa where extra censorship had been applied.

French servicemen who chose to continue the fight from British soil were disobeying their explicit orders and risked heavy penalties. At this point in time, the British permitted all French servicemen who found themselves on British territory to make a choice as to whether to remain or to be repatriated. Many chose repatriation, including some who had already made a daring escape to Britain with the original intention of joining the Free French. This right of repatriation was probably a legal obligation on the British, but the situation changed completely when the Petain regime declared that any French who did not return by August 15 were automatically sentenced to death. Mouchotte records his reaction as one of “great sadness at this evidence of the irresponsibility of our miserable government.” To show their contempt, the Free French in London organised ‘un bal des condamnés à mort’.

Expectations and Frustrations

The young Frenchmen who arrived in June 1940 were expecting and hoping to be pitched into battle immediately. After all, this is what would have happened if France had continued to fight. The reality, as they rapidly discovered, was very different. Of all the Allied servicemen who arrived from France, the only ones which the British could use immediately were trained fighter pilots, preferably with combat experience.

On July 27, Admiral Muselier addressed a group of some two hundred French volunteers in Olympia Exhibition Hall in London. The pilots were happy with what they heard. They would initially join RAF squadrons as individuals until there were sufficient numbers trained to form wholly French units. Twelve men, including Rene Mouchotte, were selected as the first group of fighter pilots, to be trained on Hurricanes and join RAF squadrons in the Battle of Britain.

Even this select band found the delay before they saw action almost intolerable. Mouchotte at last joined an RAF squadron on September 9, but was disappointed to find that he was posted first to Belfast and then to Prestwick. There were plenty of patrols but no Germans to be seen. He even admitted to feelings of jealousy when his friend Charles Guerin was posted to the Shetland Islands, where he reckoned there were slightly better chances of meeting the enemy.

This all changed on October 10 when the French pilots were posted to front-line airfields around London. Mouchotte and other French pilots were attached to 615 Squadron, which was sent to RAF Northolt to relieve Squadron 303. This squadron, which contained many Polish pilots, had been in the heart of the Battle of Britain since the end of August. It had recorded an impressive number of victories but at great cost.

Mouchotte recalled the words which the departing Poles addressed to him. "*The task is non-stop; you will be constantly on alert!"* "This promised to be interesting", Mouchotte thought, "but at what cost! Half of their comrades have been lost, and many wounded."

From then on it was constant – and dangerous – action for the next five years.

For the remaining French airmen – the vast majority – the prospects were very different. Posted to RAF St Athan, the plan was that they would complete their training and then form the planned French bomber and fighter squadrons of the FAFL. However, these squadrons would fly planes provided by the British (and later the US). Hence, first they needed to pass all the relevant training courses, whether as pilots, flight crew or ground crew, and this would normally take six months or more.

Further, the French airmen would have to learn English before they could start on the RAF courses. It was not until October 1940 that the 'franco-belge' Training School was established at RAF Odiham and training in French was once again possible. The first French airmen graduated in April 1941, and the first French squadrons entered service in October 1941. The bomber squadrons were based at RAF Elvington, near York, and served with distinction throughout the remainder of the war.

For these young men this seemed like an almost interminable delay before there was any chance that they might see action. It was a natural reaction that many of them looked for alternative avenues of service that would yield quicker results. This is well exemplified in a short article by Bernard Hugot, published in 2008, (Gazette de l'Amicale des FAFL, No. 62, pp 8-10) which included brief details of the careers of ten of the French airmen at RAF St Athan.

This article, entitled "St Athan Eté 1940", described a visit by a group of French airmen to a South Wales coalmine. This visit took place between mid-July and early September 1940. We do not know which mine it was, but it could have been the Powell Duffryn mine which was used for other RAF visits. What is of great interest is that Hugot included a brief resume of each man's history, including their age, how they arrived in Britain, and their subsequent war-time service.

Only four of the ten airmen in fact followed the prescribed course of training in the FAFL and service in the French squadrons (Clayeux, Feuvrier, Fuchs and Troupel).

Three of the others (Donnadieu, Fassin and Poizat) judged that the length of time needed to complete their air training was too long, and found another career: all three joined the BCRA (Bureau Central de Rensignements et d'Action, the service run by General de Gaulle's headquarters as the equivalent of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) of Churchill).

Of the others, Andre Sorret, who had escaped with Mouchotte from Oran, returned to the Army and by September was sailing with the Free French forces to Dakar and Chad. Ganuchaud, who was injured in an accident, went into an administrative post with the Free French Naval Forces, and Molinari joined the headquarters staff of General Valin, the head of the FAFL.

de gauche à droite haut : Deux personnels des mines puis **DONNADIEU-MOLINARI-SORRET-URARD-TROUPEL-FUCHS-GANUCHAUD** – Mineurs accroupis : **FASSIN - POISAT - CLAYEUX – FEUVRIER** Photo René Molinari via Bertrand Hugot

Commandant Urard and ten French airmen from the base at RAF St Athan pose for a group photograph, together with their guides who took them on an underground tour of a South Wales coal mine at a depth of over 2000 ft.

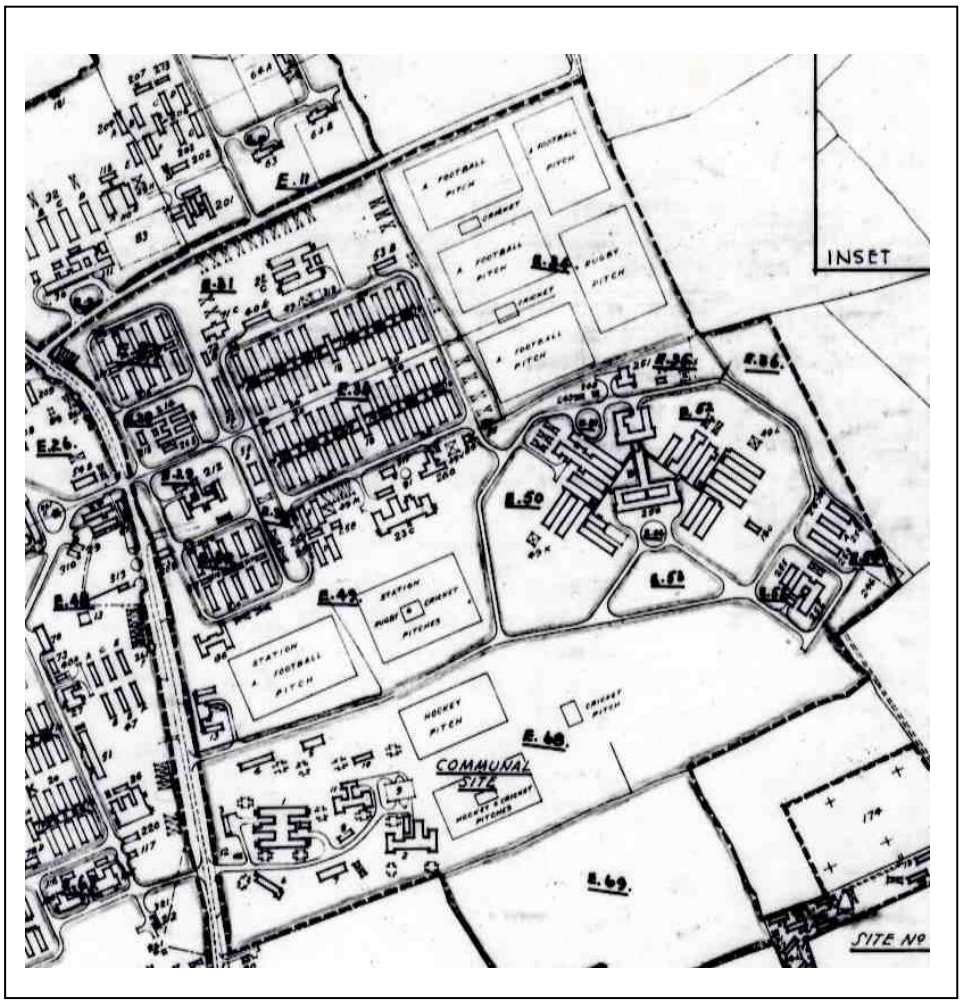
I had the opportunity to discuss this article, and the photograph of the mine visit, with Arlette Ragody-Hughes in 2016. She immediately commented on Urard: "they always called him Le Chef, because he was older." He was in fact 44, and a Commandant. The ages of the others ranged from 19 to 25.

Urard had been at the French army base at Blida in Algeria. Hugot suggests that he came to Britain via Durban. He joined the FAFL officially on June 30, 1940, with the matriculation number 30.001. This suggests that he was headhunted by Admiral Muselier, who became interim head of the FAFL the following day. Urard was one of those condemned to death, in absentia, by the Petain regime at a military tribunal in Clermont-Ferrand on September 26, 1941.

Diversions and Recreations

RAF St Athan had the population of a small town. Like all RAF stations, it had been provided from the outset with sports and entertainment facilities so that the airmen could occupy their free time both during the day and in the evening.

The station plans show extensive sports facilities close to the residential area, with pitches for football, rugby and hockey. There was a swimming pool and an outdoor running track. There was a cinema, a large gym which doubled as a dance hall, three churches and a large roller-skating rink. A station dance orchestra – known as the Saints Dance Orchestra – was formed from the musicians who had played in many of the famous bands of the time before being called up into the RAF. Regular concerts were given in the main NAAFI centre and the cinema.



1938 Plan of RAF St Athan.

(Source: RAF St Athan archives)

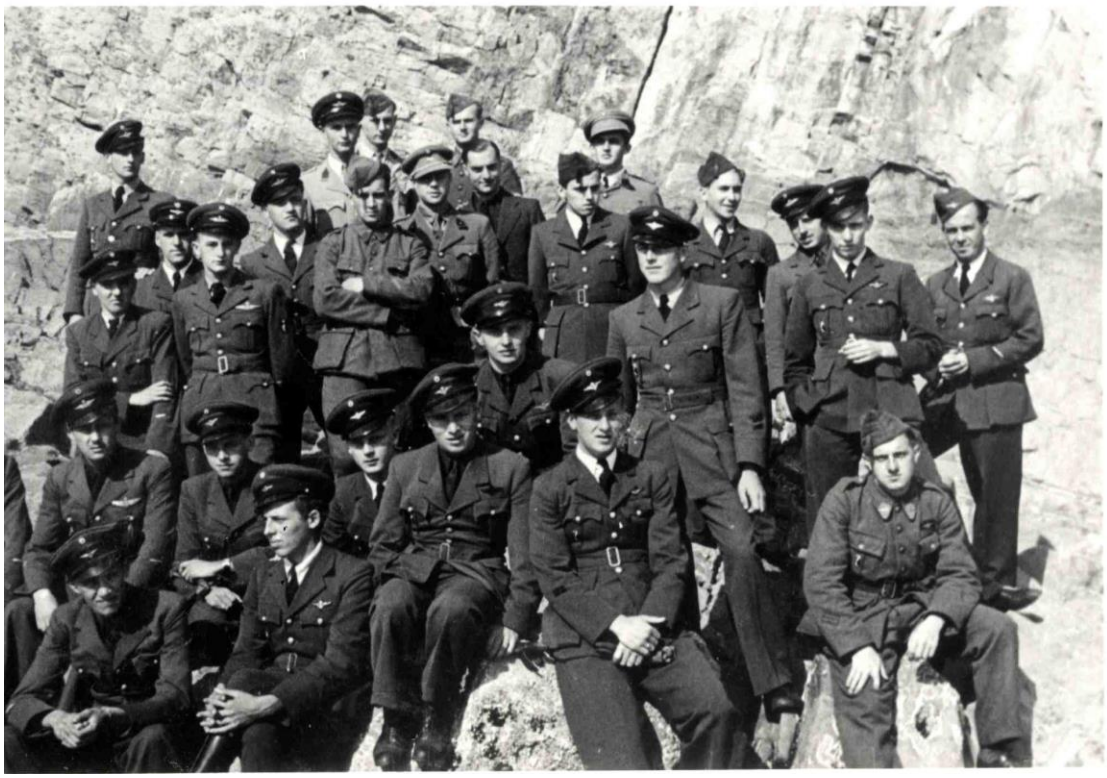
This plan shows part of the layout of the residential and sports area. At the top of the plan are some of the barracks accommodation in the form of rows of wooden huts. Below these are some of the main sports facilities: the Station football pitch; the Station rugby/cricket pitch; a hockey/cricket pitch, and further hockey and cricket pitches. On the other side of the barracks there were a further five football, rugby and hockey pitches.

Any airmen with a pass could visit the nearby towns. The village of St Athan and the town of Llantwit Major were within walking distance, as was a very pretty stretch of the South Wales coast.

It was easy to go further afield. The Cardiff-Bridgend railway passed close to the camp and a new station had been built near the camp entrance. Either of these towns could be reached within half an hour, although Cardiff would probably have been the more popular choice because of its size. RAF St Athan had also requisitioned some twenty Western Welsh coaches which were used for weekend outings.

The French airmen would have made good use of these opportunities. The mine visit, described above, would have been an organised outing by coach.

There were many attractive scenic locations to visit within easy reach of the base. We do not have any record of such trips by the French airmen, but the archives contain a photograph of the Belgian airmen on an outing to the South Wales coast at Tenby in 1940, and the French airmen probably made similar visits.



"1940 Belgian aircrew and groundcrew holding at Tenby"

Following Dunkirk, the evacuated Belgian Army was based at Tenby, while the Air Force was sent to RAF St Athan. Note that several of the officers have 'wings' indicating that they were qualified pilots. Many of these probably formed part of the Belgian contingent of 28 pilots who took part in the Battle of Britain. (Photo: RAF St Athan archives)

The FAFL also formed its own football team while at RAF St Athan. There is a formal group photograph of this team in the Ragody family archives.

The FAFL Football Team 1940

The officer to the left of the players (in French uniform) is Commandant Aimé Urard. The officer to the right of the players (in RAF uniform) is Squadron-Leader William Tregelles Edwards. (Photo: Ragody family archives)

This photograph appears to show a fairly formal occasion, but no indication of what this might be was found with the photograph. However, there is an interesting entry in the South Wales Echo (October 24, 1940) headed “Free French in Match at Newport”. This records that there was a football match between a Military League XI and the Free French Air Force at Lovell’s Ground, Newport. The result was a 4-0 win for the Military XI. It is certainly possible that this was the occasion on which this photograph was taken.

There is some interesting local history here. At the start of the war, Newport had a professional football team (Newport County FC), but their ground was requisitioned by the Army. The team then switched their home ground to Lovell’s Field, the playing fields of a large Newport factory. The normal Football League programme was suspended during the war, but there was a more limited Wartime League in which the professional teams continued to play. These were often scratch teams, including any professional footballers who were stationed in the area. In deference to their new ground, Newport County played throughout the war under the name Lovell’s Athletic. Their best season was 1942-43 when they finished second in the League, behind Liverpool but ahead of Manchester City, Arsenal and Manchester United. This is such an un-Newport-County-like result that is probably just as well that they were playing under an assumed name.

It is therefore quite likely that the photograph of the FAFL team was taken at Lovell’s Field, where the ground was an open area and not a stadium. Given that the airmen were playing a largely professional side, a 4-0 defeat should be seen as a very creditable result.

Extracts from the Local and National Press

In preparing this section of the history I carried out some searches of the local press to see if there were any references to the Society. This had proved very profitable in writing the *Early History of the Society*, when many relevant references were found for the period before and during World War I. For this history, the searches were limited to the Western Mail, the South Wales Echo and the Evening Express from May to November 1940. Copies of these newspapers are held on microfilm in Cardiff Central Library. Searches on this medium are very time-consuming and hence it was only possible to cover a limited number of months.

Complementary searches were also carried out of the national press, particularly The Times newspaper, which could be searched online using the resources of Cardiff University. This provided a picture of what was public knowledge in Britain at the time, and hence which war-time developments – political or military - members of the Society would be familiar with. It also had the advantage that it was practical to cover the whole period from pre-war to 1945.

The results of searching the local press for references to the Society and to the arrival of the Free French airmen were very thin. It was immediately apparent that censorship was in force, and there should be no reports identifying the presence of any members or units of the Allied forces. The same censorship was in force in the national press. However, the broad sweep of the military campaigns, and the 'political dynamics' of the relationship between France and Britain were fully covered.

The members of the Society, and the French colony in Cardiff, would have been able to follow the remarkable transformation of General de Gaulle from 'unknown' to the recognised leader of the Free French forces in less than four weeks. The first occasion that de Gaulle's name appeared in the Times (July 7) was in a minor role in the new French government of Paul Reynard. To help its readers, the Times added a note from its military correspondent with a few details about this obscure colonel – as he had been up to that moment – in the French army. His next appearance (July 19) was dramatic. Under the headlines "France is not Lost" and "General's Message to the Nation", this reported his broadcast of 18 June, giving the entire text and describing de Gaulle's position as Chef du Cabinet Militaire in the Reynaud government. This appeared on the same page as the report of Churchill's famous speech the same day, "This was their Finest Hour". The report of Churchill's speech highlighted his comments on "Heroic French Resistance"; he decried the likely capitulation by the new French government (Petain), but held the door open to continued French resistance in some form.

Events moved swiftly. De Galle broadcast again: the report in the Times (June 24) was, headlined "France is not Dead" and said that this speech announced the creation of a French National Committee with the agreement of the British government. A further broadcast, reported in the Times (June 27) under the headline "A Soldier Speaks", was a direct rejection by de Gaulle, addressed to Petain personally, of the terms of the armistice. Two days later (June 29), under the headlines "Recognition of De Gaulle" and "Full Support by Britain", the Times reported the announcement of the British government that they now recognised de Gaulle as the "leader of all Free Frenchmen".

Although de Gaulle was now recognised as the leader of continued French resistance, the position of French nationals in Britain was uncertain. Legally, they were aliens and hence came under restriction. In July, the status of French nationals as aliens was officially announced, but with the proviso that "special consideration will be given to those who satisfy the authorities that they are willing actively to support the Allied cause" (The Times, July 9). This gave an opportunity to the French in Cardiff to secure their status, and clearly was a factor in the formal resolution of the Society (reproduced in the *Centenary History*) "*de soutenir l'active collaboration qui existe entre le Gouvernement de sa Majesté et le Chef de la France Libre*."

Regular announcements in the press demonstrated how the Free French Forces were establishing themselves in Britain. While not revealing details, the impression was given of a

significant military capability, with several army, naval and air force units. This began on July 2, when it was reported that de Gaulle had appointed Admiral Muselier as head of the Free French Navy and Free French Air Force. This was the first indication of the formation of all three branches within the Free French Forces.

One of the problems for the Free French Forces was that they lacked equipment. A popular saying of the day was that they were 'soldiers without tanks, sailors without ships, and airmen without planes.' Another problem was funding, not least to pay the troops. Behind the scenes, discussions were taking place over how the British could fund and equip the Free French. Agreement on this was made public on August 8. Importantly, for the servicemen, pay would be backdated to July 1.

For the general public, these arrangements were probably regarded as mere matters of detail. British support for de Gaulle had already been assured, it was a now question of how soon the Free French would become a credible force. The British government, however, had to find a way of giving a formal status to the Free French when they were not in a position to recognise a French government in exile. This was solved through the Allied Forces Act, published on August 14, which recognised two classes of Allied forces: those of free sovereign states (Poland, Norway), and those of "any foreign authority recognised as competent to maintain naval, military, or air forces for service with HM Forces." This second category was there to give an official status to the Free French.

During July and August there was a succession of reports on the activities of the Free French forces. On July 27, The Times reported that the Free French Navy was now comprised of a number of French warships which had sailed for British ports before the signing of the Armistice. These were now in service, either with wholly French or mixed British/French crews. In August, De Gaulle inspected fighter pilots and planes squadrons "somewhere in England", emphasising that these had been in combat in France (The Times, August 12). A few days later, there was a report of exercises by the Free French Army "over a Southern heath" involving tanks and light armour (The Times, August 14). Later in the month, official British support was made clear when the King met De Gaulle and the Free French Forces at a "camp of the Foreign Legion in the Southern Command" (The Times, August 21).

Both the national and the local press carried the pronouncements of the Petain government against de Gaulle and the Free French. Thus, on June 24, after the Armistice terms were published, there was an official French announcement that de Gaulle would be court-martialled and charged with "refusing to return to his post and addressing an appeal to French soldiers from foreign territory" (The Times, June 24). Two weeks later (Western Mail, July 8), there was an announcement – both vindictive and comical – that General de Gaulle had been sentenced by a Toulouse court to four years imprisonment and fined 100 Francs; in addition, his recent promotion from colonel to general was rescinded and he was placed on the retired list.

On the same day came a sobering report headed "DEATH PENALTY", in which the French government announced that "French persons serving with the British Forces will be liable to penalties ranging from hard labour to death" (The Times, July 8). Early the following month, it was reported that de Gaulle had been "condemned to death by a Military Court in absentia, charged with treason, attacks on the security of the State, and desertion to a foreign country in time of war" (The Times, August 3). The same report also carried the news of the forthcoming trials of M. Daladier and the other civil and military leaders charged with "having led France into war with Germany and with the responsibility for France's defeat", which would begin on August 8 before the French Supreme Court at Riom.

One undoubted consequence of the Petain regime's pursuit – in vain – of de Gaulle was to increase his credibility. In less than two months he had come from unheard-of to be front-page news.

Very occasionally, the local press carried some news of local war action. On July 17, the Western Mail reported – as a German claim – that Cardiff and St Athan had been bombed. We are probably seeing the results of censorship here, since Bond (p15) records bombing

raids on St Athan and the locality on June 20, July 15 and July 18. Interestingly, there was not a single reference to RAF St Athan in the Times for the entire duration of the war – again, probably due to censorship.

Another item in the Western Mail (July 23) reported that there were "155 French Boys in a Welsh Camp". Without giving details – the camp sounded more boy scout than military – it explained that these boys had "in small parties managed to evade capture and in various ways got across the English Channel." One of these French Boys was probably François Tanguy, who had sailed as part of a group of 128 young men in small boats from the Ile de Sein off Brittany shortly after June 18. After the war, he was the French consul in Cardiff for several years and was well known to members of the Society.

One single reference to the activities of the Cardiff French Society was found (Western Mail, Friday, July 26), but this is an interesting reflection of Arlette's account of the Society's activities in this period.

"At Home" to French Airmen

The president, officers and members of the Cardiff Anglo-French Society were "at home" to men of the French Air Force and French Naval Air Force at their clubrooms in Park Place, Cardiff, on Thursday evening.

A standing invitation is being extended by the club to all French airmen who happen to be in the district giving them the use of the clubrooms whenever they wish – to rest, read, write, or meet their friends.

Western Mail, July 26, 1940

Arlette's talk recalled that the members of the French Society wanted give the young men of the Free French as much support as they could. It has been said that it took a particular kind of courage for these airmen to join the Free French, for three reasons. Firstly, they were disobeying orders, and as military men they would be deeply troubled by this. The Petain regime had made it clear that they were regarded as deserters and traitors. Secondly, they were in exile in a foreign country, out of contact with their families and loved ones, and not knowing how long it might be before they had news or saw them again. Thirdly, in June 1940, it seemed that Hitler held all the cards. In a few weeks Germany had occupied Northern Europe from the North Cape to the Spanish border and had crushed France. Petain believed – and most of France would have agreed – that, once Hitler attacked, Britain would not last six weeks.

The French Society could do nothing about Petain. It could do nothing about Hitler. But it could – and did – offer the Free French who found themselves in the Cardiff area a little piece of France, where they could meet and speak French, and homes where they could spend their leave and relax.

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http://www.francais-a-cardiff.org.uk/history/centenary-history-en.pdf

RAF ST ATHAN

50th Anniversary Booklet

Royal Air Force St Athan: A History 1938-1988, by S J Bond, 1988, published by Services Publishing Services (SPS), Chapel Lane, Corby, Northants NN17 1AX. No ISBN.

HISTORY OF FAFL

History of FAFL

fandavion.free.fr is a French web site devoted to aviation. It has an excellent history of the FAFL from its beginnings to its final fusion with the regular air force in 1945 at http://fandavion.free.fr/fafl.htm.

France 3 programme:

Illustrated text of a France 3 programme, posted Sept 2020. "How Rene Mouchotte and a dozen comrades took part in the Battle of Britain" at the following (very long) link:

https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/hauts-de-france/seconde-guerre-mondiale-comment-rene-mouchotte-douzaine-francais-ont-pris-part-bataille-angleterre-1860802.html

EVACUATIONS FROM FRANCE

Admiralty Diary June 13-28

The Admiralty diary for Operation Ariel is available online at:
https://www.naval-history.net/xDKWDa-Aerial.htm
This covers the evacuation of troops and civilians from western France at the time of the Fall of France. Approximately 150,000 British troops, 50,000 Allied troops and 30-40,000 civilians were evacuated.

ST ATHAN MINE VISIT

St Athan Eté 1940

Article by Bernard Hugot
Gazette de l'Amicale des Forces Aériennes Françaises Libres, No. 62, April 2008, pp 8-10, 59 rue Vergniaud – 75013 Paris.

Commandant Urard

The web site www.francaislibres.net gives biographical details of members of the Free French. There are biographical notes on Aimé Urard and also a copy of an item in *Paris-soir* (1941/09/27) announcing the decisions of the military tribunal, including the death sentence on Urard.