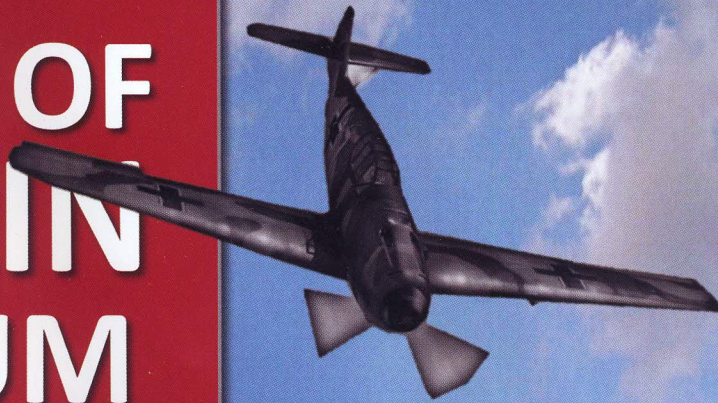


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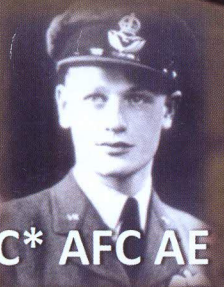


# KENT BATTLE OF BRITAIN MUSEUM



# 50

# *YEARS OF HISTORY*



W/CMDR. TOM NEIL DFC\* AFC AE  
at RAF Hawkinge - EXCLUSIVE!

THE LEGENDARY RENÉ MOUCHOTTE  
By JAN LEEMING

SPECIAL REPORT  
By SIR DAVID JASON

LUFTWAFFE AT THE MUSEUM

THE OFFICIAL  
KENT BATTLE OF  
BRITAIN MUSEUM  
MAGAZINE

## ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# £7



# KENT BATTLE OF BRITAIN MUSEUM MAGAZINE



Edition No. 6

Spring/Summer 2016

FOR this special edition to mark the 50th anniversary of the Museum we've been overwhelmed by the kindness of many contributors who sent us unique articles in honour of not only 'The Few' of the Battle of Britain but of our own 'Many' who over the decades dedicated their time and efforts to ensure the Museum's vast collection of artefacts from 1940 became the best in the world.

We also thank the advertisers who continue to support this magazine as they too always acknowledge the years of hard work and dedication which have gone into the making of today's exhibition at Hawkinge, Kent.

I only had to ask Battle of Britain ace and author Wing Commander Tom Neil DFC\* AFC AE once about helping me to launch this special supplement and ever the gentleman he jumped in like a flash and sent in his exclusive article about his memories of RAF Hawkinge during the war. Thanks too to his lovely assistant Dr Margaret Clotworthy who helped to arrange this. I hope as many of you as possible will make a note in your diary to visit Wing Commander Neil at the Museum on August 14, 2016. He is due to be there that day signing his wonderful book '*Scramble*' and copies of the *Kent Battle of Britain Museum magazine*.

Also happy to write for us in this important anniversary year for the Museum is the amazing Dr Helen Doe whose father Wing Commander 'Bob' Doe DSO DFC\* along with his friends the late great Wing Commander 'Bob' Foster DFC and Squadron Leader Kenneth 'Lucky' Lusty AE, had visited us in the past.

It was wonderful when BBC broadcaster Jan Leeming agreed to take time out of her busy

schedule to send in her feature article about the Free French pilot Rene Mouchotte. I had visited 'The Wing' Building at Capel-le-Ferne earlier this year when Jan gave an illuminating talk about her connection with Rene and the story of how she felt inspired to make a film about him must be read.

On the subject of great films I hope to be able to report back soon on Gerry Johnston's new documentary about the life and times of the Irish fighter pilot ace 'Paddy' Finucane. Thanks to Gerry this magazine contains a great article about 'Paddy' and some rare photographs.

As many readers know we have been running a series of articles about the pioneering Terry Parsons who has excavated more than 900 aircraft from the Battle of Britain and World War Two. Many of the artefacts he has found since the 1960s are on show in the Museum. During our interviews Terry has told me how many of the early 'diggers' at the forefront of aviation archaeology relied on a book called '*Battle over Britain*' written by former RAF pilot Frank Mason. This book was known as the 'Bible' and contains a wealth of detailed information about RAF and Luftwaffe crashes of 1940.

It is at this point I extend great thanks to military historian and author Martin Windrow who as a young man in the 1960s had the privilege to work with Frank and edit '*Battle Over Britain*'. On pages 60 - 63 he pays tribute to Frank, and thanks to Museum Trustee Richard Windrow (Martin's brother) we pay our respects to aviation artist Michael Roffe whose stunning colour plates of RAF and Luftwaffe aircraft appear in the book. If you

visit The Armoury and The Lord Dowding Hangar at the Museum the original artwork by the talented Mr Roffe is on display and well worth admiring for its detail.

On the Home Front there's been great support from author Ann Kramer who writes and lectures on the Land Army. I just had to include in this special supplement an article about 'Spitfire Mary' - the wonderful Air Transport Auxiliary First Officer Mary Ellis who along with her colleagues helped deliver 309,000 aircraft from factory to RAF airfields throughout the war. Mary herself flew 400 Spitfires and 76 different types of aircraft.

Indeed it was Mary's friend Carolyn Grace who owns the famous two-seater 'Grace Spitfire' who flew Sir David Jason over the White Cliffs of Dover when he was filming a special tribute to 'The Few'.

Sir David kindly gave his permission to use an article he wrote about the Battle of Britain and there's some cracking photographs and interviews too which accompany his feature including comments from Battle of Britain legend - Wing Commander Paul Farnes DFM. Indeed so many people are owed a huge debt of thanks, and with the help of Museum Trustee Tony Parslow and several other early pioneers including Terry Parsons and Tony Webb I have within the pages of this supplement been supported in the recording of the history of the Museum and we have published many names of those past and present who built a Museum collection to be proud of.

Thank you to one and all.

Editor

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Front Cover picture - courtesy of RAF Coningsby.

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# 'Fifty-plus bandits approaching from the south-east. Angels 17'

By

Wing Commander Tom Neil DFC\* AFC AE

I HAD been with 249 Squadron at North Weald just a day or so before I was scrambled towards Hawkinge in my Hurricane in the afternoon of September 3, 1940.

An excerpt from my memoir 'Scramble' (*Gun Button to Fire*) reads: 'I was on the 'state' when we all came to Readiness in the early morning of 3 September. The weather was brilliant with little more than an early morning mist and I had a new aircraft, V7313. I thanked God that it wasn't an 'L' or 'N' series - I was fed up with them. 56 Squadron's aircraft were newer than ours probably because they lost them a good deal more quickly! I had no particular feelings of excitement or concern, just the proper degree of eagerness.

We stood or sat around a large unlit stove in the crew-room. Waiting. An airman occupied the tiny office by the entrance and manned the telephone. From time to time, a bell would ring and we would all hold our breath as it was answered. As the weeks passed we grew to hate that telephone.

But other less urgent messages were passed as well, particularly before a major raid when Sector Ops would inform us that plots were building up over France, providing us with a picture of the general situation. The difference between operating in the Middle Wallop and North Weald Sectors was most noticeable; at North Weald, we were invariably kept informed before the event and controlled with understanding and helpful information throughout the interception. At Middle Wallop, we were frequently given just the scramble instruction, after which - silence! There were probably perfectly good reasons for this, but they cut no ice with us; we were concerned only with the quality of service.

At 9 a.m., the squadron was scrambled. I was in the leading section of three on John Grandy's



Copyright: Tom Neil

**HURRICANE PILOT:** *W/Cmdr. Tom Neil at the controls of a Hurricane.*

right with Percy Burton on his left. We took off in a wild rush towards the east and I found the masts floating past my left shoulder while climbing up. Not so bad after all.

Patrol Chelmsford, we were instructed. Enemy plots were building up - twenty, then forty, then fifty plus! We were being positioned as a precaution.

As we laboured up, I switched on my gunsight, adjusted the intensity of the red graticules, set the wingspan adjuster to sixty feet and turned my gun button to 'Fire'. I then leaned forward and 'pulled the plug' - the device which overrode the boost governor mechanism. Nothing much happened to the boost but at least I knew I was having all there was. My engine at 2,600 revs was quite smooth. I always flew at 2,600 revs except in combat when conventional wisdom had it that 2,850 produced a better performance.

We climbed hard, turning slowly, the whole squadron lifting, falling and leaning in slow motion. Everyone together. In position. There was no cloud worth mentioning but I was too busy keeping station to be scanning the horizon or be much concerned about the enemy.

The plots were still building up, it seemed. An unspoken thought: were we too early? And in the right place? Time would tell.

We wandered about, lances levelled. Ready. Waiting. Essex spread out beneath us - the Blackwater, the east coast, and to the south, the line of the Thames. Visibility at height, a million miles. The Huns seemed to be taking a long time, though. Round once more. And again.

We had been airborne almost an hour when the order to pancake was given. What a sell. We dropped down quickly towards base. Well, at least we would have been in position if they had decided to come. Better than being too late.

We landed, taxied in quickly and the bowsers lumbered forward to hook up and begin refuelling. My airscrew tottered to a standstill. Crew members in the wing-roots. 'Everything all right, sir?' New faces, but eager and smiling.

'Fine!' Turn round quickly, was the urgent instruction. We needed no persuading. My own aircraft was full but some of the others weren't when the air-raid siren began its banshee wail and our second scramble order came.

Patrol base this time. Crikey! That didn't sound so good.

I raced across the grass to my position on John Grandy's right. Then, full throttle, 3,000 revs, and off again. Wheels up - I didn't even look. The masts drifting past. Climbing like hell. The squadron strung out. Cutting corners and catching up. Climb! Climb! Hell's bells! We couldn't climb any faster. My throttle lever at full stretch. Being up-front, I was all right, but think of the poor blighters behind! From Sector: 'Fifty plus bandits approaching from the south-east. Angels 17.'

We clawed our way up, my engine raging. Through 7,000 feet; 10,000. Up to 12,000. Flying roughly east.

Then, above and at eleven o'clock, ack-ack fire. Faint brown smudges. Pecking. More ack-ack. Blossoming. A growing cluster of it. Everything in slow motion. Then, *aircraft!* In the middle of all the puffs, Huns! Oh, God! Masses of them! 'Tallyho!' My eyes glued to them. Fascinated. Growing closer. Clearer now. Large ones in the front and in the middle. Others like flies, stepped up and behind. Thousands, it seemed. And there were only twelve of us!



We were below them and to the south. The Blackwater was in the background and they were heading due west. We turned slowly to the left, climbing hard still. I could see them properly now; the bombers were Dornier 17s, the fighters Me 110s. Forging steadily ahead. Through the flowering puffs of ack-ack. Taking no notice. Oblivious.

The CO said in a tense voice: 'Steady GANER squadron', and I was aware that I was the outside aircraft on the right of the formation looking up and to my left towards the bombers and above and to my right for the 110s.

The 110s close now. Very close. I could see them clearly. Some sort of coloured markings on the nearest aircraft. I was going to pass right underneath! If they chose to come down now we were finished. Close. Turning to the left still and going hard. But I couldn't hit any of the bombers from here! They were the important ones, to heck with the fighters! Right underneath now; I could reach up and touch them. Why on earth weren't they coming down? My head bent right back. One 110 suspended above me - I could see its airscrews rotating.

Then, wings flashing. My leader turning on his back. Other aircraft diving. A moment of utter surprise and panic. Mustn't be left! I tumbled after them in pursuit. What was happening? Were we being attacked? I kept screwing my head around but could see nothing. My Hurricane dropping like a stone, dust rising from around my feet, my head pressed against the roof of the cockpit. Other aircraft to my left. Diving like hell, then pulling out. Hurricanes! I joined them. John Grandy's aircraft. But I hadn't fired! I hadn't had time to fire!

The RT and a voice from below. High pitched with excitement but controlled. 'We've been hit GANER squadron, but we're all right.'

I looked over the side. To my surprise, we were directly over North Weald and far below, the whole aerodrome was hidden beneath a huge, spreading grey-brown pall of smoke and dust. They'd bombed us! The airfield! The blighters had bombed our airfield! It never occurred to me for a moment that we might not be able to land on it.

I looked up. Far above, aircraft were turning away northwards. Were they the bombers? I couldn't see. Join up! I looked about. I was in a formation of sorts. More Hurricanes were surging into position. Urgently. Rocking, bouncing with



**PILOTS OF 249 SQUADRON IN 1940:** *From left to right - Percy Burton, 'Butch' Barton, Gerald Lewis, 'Ozzie' Crossey, Tom Neil, John Beazley, John Grandy, George Barclay and Keith Lofts. This picture was widely distributed among the Luftwaffe as representing the type of RAF pilot they were up against'.*

*Visitors to The Armoury at the Museum can see the jacket worn by George Barclay.*

and with tilting wings. We flew around. The sky suddenly clear. Magically. Then the 'pancake' instruction. We began to let down. But I hadn't fired! Not a single bullet. I turned my gun button to 'Safe'.

By the time we were back in the circuit, much of the smoke and dust had disappeared. All that remained were scores of large molehills on the grass. There had been other damage, too, and lives lost, but I was aware only of the need to get down and the business of finding space on which to land. We flew in from the direction of the masts, in rough sections of three, and touched down across the concrete and on the grass, weaving gently between the bomb-holes. As they raced past, mostly to my left, I watched them quite dispassionately. There was no problem, no one was the least bit concerned and we all landed safely and without incident.

Within twenty minutes, all twelve Hurricanes had been refuelled and were ready for off. On the airfield itself, there was activity. The shock passing, life was returning to normal. Jolly good job the bombing had not occurred the day before; my poor parents could well have been killed! The bombs seemed all on that side of the aerodrome. Two hangars had been hit, we were told. We could see smoke from a distance but had not the time to go over to the far side of the airfield for a closer inspection. Nor, indeed, did I particularly want to.

We collected. Excited. Discussing. The Tannoy system was out of action, apparently. The water mains, too. No washing! Someone laughed. The small boy's dream. Things quietened down.

Things quietened down. Gradually. Nothing much happened until the afternoon. News began filtering through.

The Ops room on the airfield and other buildings had been badly damaged, one of the hangars, massively. Someone said that some of 25 Squadron's Blenheims had been burned out but we were too far away to see. We all felt fine and not the least bit upset, although some of the chaps who had not been flying and who had been forced to take shelter when the bombs had come down, hadn't liked it very much. The noise and blast, more than anything. A terrible din.

I found it all vastly interesting, as though witnessing some epic film performance. But, I hadn't been killed, had I? Or injured?

Later, the sun still shining, dispersal was a hive of industry and some of the holes were being filled in. Some bombs had not gone off. We had lunch. Talking like mad but not finding it difficult to eat. There was another scramble in the early afternoon - Maidstone - Canterbury patrol line, was the shouted instruction. I had only a rough idea where Maidstone and Canterbury were so I just followed my leader.

We climbed up steeply over the Thames and to the left of the huge pall of smoke-haze that was London. It was my first time over London and Kent. The river had more kinks in it than I expected and was silver in colour, the estuary stretching away to the east into mist and oblivion. Below to our right, were masses of balloons. More than I had ever seen in my life. We went south, the air electric with tension, my head turning constantly, the sky vast, and blue

and empty, the sun a golden ball. Down towards the south coast.

We were warned of bogeys high up but did not see them. Then we did. A few. Me 109s, probably. They were very small and fast so couldn't be anything else. I had never seen a 109 before. I was not in the least apprehensive, just enormously interested.

Very far south now. Over Dover. Away below, the ring of the harbour mole and balloons. News of more aircraft and ack-ack smudges. Pretty close, too. Were they shooting at us, I wondered? Silly blighters! I didn't see any more aircraft, probably because I was too busy keeping station. Fairly buzzing about, rocking this way and that and on tenterhooks for fear of being jumped. This Hurricane of mine wasn't too bad. Quite good, in fact. I would see if I could hang on to it.

We turned and retraced our path. Back over Kent. Round again in wide circles then up and down before finally heading north towards the river and losing height over Essex. Home! We'd been up a long time - one hour and forty minutes. Bit of an anti-climax, though. Still. Back in dispersal, my crew told me that one of our chaps had just crashed on touch-down and that his aircraft had caught fire. What, one of ours? Now? I hadn't seen it. Sergeant Rowell, a voice said. Damaged by ack-ack, it appeared. By ack-ack? Probably those clowns at Dover!

For the first time I noticed that one of the hangars was in a terrible mess with the remains of a Blenheim looking like a fish's skeleton the cat had left...

TOM NEIL

*\*More of Tom's Battle of Britain story is in his new book 'Scramble!'*



# ALL EYES ON THE SKY

The Lord Dowding Hangar in the Museum houses a splendid display honouring the gallant efforts of the ever-watchful Observer Corps in 1940. In this report compiled by former Chief Observer 25 Post, Linton, Kent - LES BURT - we learn the history of an organisation that proved an essential aid to the RAF towards the end of World War One, throughout World War Two and the Cold War.

**B**Y the start of World War One it was recognised that there would be air attacks on the south east and in 1914 Special Constables were appointed in order that they would contact London if they had spotted any aircraft overhead. But sadly there was no co-ordination between this auxiliary operation and it did not help the anti aircraft gun efforts and not a single Zeppelin had been shot down.

In May 1915 a single Zeppelin penetrated at night to the east end of London and caused casualties.

In June 1917 twenty Gotha bombers, in daylight, bombed London and suffered no casualties. Later the Staaken Giant aircraft appeared as well.

As a result of public outcry an artillery officer named Major General Edward Bailey Ashmore CB, CMG, MVO (1872 - 1953) who also had RAF Wings and once commanded a Royal Flying Corps' wing, was appointed to be the one Commander for the defence of London until he retired in 1940 but then became an officer in the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) which later became the Home Guard. During his service he formed the Observer Corps into an efficient organisation and also helped in the formation of the ROC/RAF plotting tables and manoeuvres.

The Metropolitan Observation Service, an early information service, was extended by Ashmore and a similar method of operation evolved that was incorporated when the Observer Corps was formed. (The Observer Corps was awarded the title The Royal Observer Corps by His Majesty King George VI in April 1941)

By July 1917 London Air Defence Area (LADA) had been formed with Ashmore in command. Proper co-ordination was arranged between the Observation Service and the gun and aircraft services.

During a Gotha raid in daylight all aircraft were turned back. After this setback they only flew at above 10,000 feet under cover of darkness.

All aircraft and gun belts were extended and by 1918 they covered large areas round outer London, small areas stretching up the east coast to Colchester, and two areas across Kent from Romney Marsh to Herne Bay and Margate to Folkestone. The last German air raid took place in May 1918.

As you see the bombing of London began in 1917 after an early period of peace, in a similar manner to the 1939-1945 war.

After the Armistice was declared in 1918

considerable reductions were made in all forces and Air Defence particularly suffered. However in 1922, after pressure on the government, it was agreed to increase the money available and in 1924 Ashmore was commanded to re-form the 'Air Observation' system.

In August-September that year with Ashmore in charge, Special Constables were manning ten posts set up in central Kent from Cranbrook to Tenterden with a control centre at Cranbrook Post Office. To test the efficiency of this group of men an aircraft flew on a special course covering all Posts and was plotted with speed and accuracy. Ashmore's scheme proved a great success.

In 1925 two Observer Groups were formed. One centred at Maidstone with 27 Posts and the other at Horsham with 16 Posts. Subsequently, after the system was proved other groups were formed and by the beginning of 1939 the whole of the country was covered with the exception of Wales and parts of Scotland. Group Headquarters were mainly in large requisitioned buildings. During the period from 1925 until 1939 and then during the 'Phoney War' advantage was taken to perfect the Observer Corps as a serious defence organisation.

On the declaration of war in September 1939 the Observer Corps was immediately mobilised to a full time twenty-four hour service and put on a war footing, but still a volunteer unpaid service.

They saw immediate action in the English Channel from Suffolk to Sussex as aircraft attacked coastal shipping and this continued for a long period.

At that time Radar was operational but was still developing, and was responsible for plots over the nearer parts of Europe. The Observer Corps was responsible for the continuation of the Radar tracks from over the sea and all tracks originating over this country.

From the Observer Corps' Operations Rooms this information was given to RAF Fighter Centres, Fighter Stations and adjacent OC operation rooms with two way communication. Information was also given to the Home Office, AFS, ARP. As the air war developed this list was increased by local arrangements.

In July 1940 the hostile air activity increased with coastal ports and some inland targets attacked in the south and east. At night targets were widely dispersed and plotting by sound was introduced and proved successful in giving the track, height and number of aircraft.

In August airfields in the south-east were attacked in great strength and thus the Battle of Britain began.

During the Battle of Britain the Maidstone He-



MAJOR GENERAL EDWARD ASHMORE:  
*Head of the ROC during WWII.*

adquarters of the OC was reporting directly to RAF Biggin Hill Fighter Sector; each observation post making its reports to a plotter seated around a large table where they were plotted by the uses of magnetic plaques across the map table. The tracks were then reported to the RAF Sector Operations Room from where the necessary operational orders were issued to fighter stations. A display illustrating the system is on show today in the Kent Battle of Britain Museum and can be seen in the Lord Dowding Hangar. It was created by Trustee Tony Parslow.

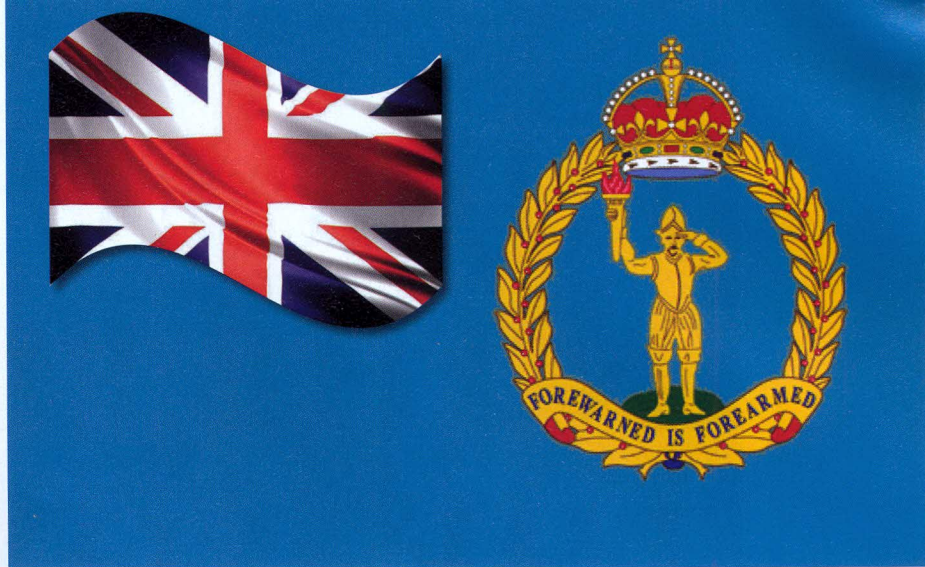
During 1940 it was London that eventually became the Luftwaffe's main target and the capital was heavily bombed. This phase continued until the middle of September when the Germans gave up daylight bombing and started night bombing; London at first and then their deadly raids were inflicted upon other cities throughout Britain.

Thus the Battle of Britain ended and Hitler gave up any idea of invading England as he had not totally destroyed the RAF.

Subsequently in April 1941 the Observer Corps was officially praised for its services and the King approved the Corps should be officially known as the Royal Observer Corps.

The next phase of the air battle began on September 7th when fighter and fighter bombers





**BADGES:** *The Observer Corps emblem during 1940. By the following year the organisation become The Royal Observer Corps and took part in the defence of Britain until the end of the Cold War in 1991. The badge on the right bears the crown of HM The King.*

swept inland at a height of 20,000 ft. over Kent and towards London.

At the time radar at this height was not reliable and the ROC provided tracking information. The RAF found difficulty in interception due to the height and speed of the raiders but eventually improved their methods and the intensity of these attacks passed. German night bombing increased, and spread, and was only stopped when the invasion took place in 1944.

As the training of pilots increased ROC posts near high ground were supplied with "Granite" which were ground flares. These were lit when an aircraft was approaching high ground as a warning.

Other Posts nearer the bomber airfields "Darkie" were fitted with radio sets by which observers could communicate with damaged bombers returning from a raid and gave them directions to the nearest airfield.

When the invasion was planned it was recognised that aircraft recognition was not good in the Navy or Merchant Navy and the ROC were requested to supply 796 volunteers as "aircraft identifiers" to serve on various ships. No aircraft were to be fired on unless agreed by the identifier. All volunteers wore a shoulder flash "SEABORNE" which they retained when they returned to their Post.

The arrival of "Doodle Bugs" (V1) on April 18, 1944 led the ROC Headquarters to give instructions about the enemy using Pilotless Aircraft. When the first attack was recognised the code word "Diver" was to be used. On June 13, the first V1 was reported by the Dymchurch Observer Post. From there on the ROC was deeply involved in the tracking and destruction of the V1. The V1 was also released by aircraft.

By September 1944 the V1 activity slowly ceased as the invasion proceeded. The part played by the Royal Observer Corps was praised.

When the Rocket (V2) attacks began it was not possible to do anything but attack their launching sites. In the VI building at the Museum today it is possible to see a German flying bomb built for Operation Crossbow and there is also model on show of a VI launch site built by top military modeller and Museum Trustee Richard Windrow.

As the invasion regressed ROC activity was



Picture: Melody Foreman

**PROUD:** *HRH Prince Michael of Kent studies the Museum's Royal Observer Corps display with Trustee Tony Parslow during a royal visit in 2015.*

reduced and on May 12 came "Stand Down" after nearly six years of voluntary continuous wartime service from a total of some 1400 posts and control rooms.

On June 24, 1945, 'Battle of Britain Sunday', at a Royal Observer Corps march past at RAF North Weald the ROC received their official banner. In fact by the end of hostilities the Corps was stood down until 1947 when it was reformed to deal mainly with the threat of the low level raider that could reach under the radar screen; the Corps continued to exercise in this peacetime role of aircraft reporting until 1955 when training began in an additional nuclear role. The ROC was in action throughout the Cold War and was stood down in 1991.

*Les Burt*

