

THE BRAINS BEHIND THE TEETH

“The fighters were the teeth of the Fighter Command. But scarcely less important were the ‘eye’ and ‘brain’ organisations and the ‘nervous system’ which carried the information between them, to position the ‘teeth’ so they could snap at the enemy with greatest effect.”

(Alfred Price in The Hardest Day).



Map showing all Fighter Groups defending Southern England from German bombing raids during the Battle of Britain 1940.

The leader of Fighter Command was Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding.

“an exceptionally far-sighted innovator and a very capable administrator, an aloof complex figure. To the fighter pilots, Dowding was like a character in a play who exerts a continual influence on events, but who seldom appears on stage.” (Alfred Price in The Hardest Day)

Before the Second World War, the Royal Air Force was organised into ‘Fighter’ and ‘Bomber’ Commands. Fighter Command was further split into Groups, of which the south-east was 11 Group. These Groups were divided into Sectors, each with a principal aerodrome. Kenley Sector was responsible for protecting the capital from attacks.



Hugh Dowding.



Kenley Operations Room as painted by a Second World War WAAF plotter, 1943-44.

“Everyone worked hard. Everyone wanted to do their best. I mean, we didn’t think about it, we just did it.”

(Edith Kup, WAAF plotter at Kenley)

The stars of the show at the fighter stations were the pilots, but their successes depended on the teams of support staff, who operated at ground level.

Radar (Radio Directional Finding) detected approaching aircraft out to sea, then the Observer Corps followed them overland. This information was filtered and passed to the Operations Room, where the picture of the developing raid was plotted. The fighters were then scrambled and directed to intercept the enemy.

“I was trained as an RDF operator. They told us that on no account were we to say who we were, what we were or what we were doing, and if anyone asked us, we were cooks.” (Jackie Moggridge, RDF Operator with the WAAF)

Arthur Owens, an electrician living in Kingston, secretly passed on intelligence to the Germans about the existence of radar and the number of aircraft stationed at Kenley. Despite having this information, and much to British surprise, the radar stations were not often bombed. This was later found to be due to a German administrative error.



When an air patrol landed, the intelligence officer would receive the pilots reports (1940).



This board forms part of the Kenley Heritage Trail created and funded by a partnership between the City of London Corporation, Kenley Airfield Friends Group and Tandridge District Council.