

## **AIR MARSHAL SIR JOHN D'ALBIAC KCVO, KBE, CB, DSO (1908-10)**

Born on 28 January 1894, he was educated at Seabrook Lodge School, Kent, Framlingham College and the RMC Sandhurst where he was commissioned into the Army in 1914. Seconded to the RNAS in 1915 and on 6 September 1915, he was acting as observer, when they sighted and attacked a submarine seven miles North of Ostend, one of the first, if not the first attack made on a submarine by a British aircraft.



He was subsequently awarded the DSO for his role in this raid and his citation for the award reads :-

In recognition of his services as an aeroplane observer at Dunkirk since February 1915. During the past year Lieutenant D'Albiac has been continually employed in coastal reconnaissances and fighting patrols. The Vice-Admiral Commanding the Dover Patrol, in reporting on the work of the R.N.A.S. at Dunkirk, lays particular emphasis on the good work done by the observers."

Transferring to the RAF in the following year he went on to fill a number of overseas staff appointments during the interwar years.

At the outbreak of the Second World War he was AOC RAF Palestine, but with the Italian attack on Greece in 1940, D'Albiac found himself promoted to Air Vice Marshal and appointed commander of the meagre air forces in Greece. These forces consisted of 80 aircraft against approximately 800 German and 300 Italian machines. He was almost immediately posted to Iraq following the premature removal of AVM Smart as a result of the 'Battle of Habbaniya'. Within a month of assuming command in Ceylon, he was faced with an attempted assault on the island by the Japanese Navy. To combat this assault of over 300 carrier borne aircraft, he had a force of 50 Hurricanes, 14 Blenheims, six Catalina's and some Fulmars of the FAA. Heavily outnumbered, his forces successfully fought off the Japanese, who never again ventured into the Indian Ocean in any force. Having formed the new 2nd Tactical Air Force, he found himself replaced by Arthur Coningham six months later.

During his time in command of new 2nd Tactical Air Force in 1943, he took the march past of the College ATC in Market Square. He also arranged for some senior members of the College Air Crew to visit the Squadron.

In 1944 he was awarded the Legion of Merit by the USA.

On retirement from the RAF in 1946, D'Albiac was Director-General Personnel at the Air Ministry and was awarded his knighthood.

Post war, he became Aerodrome Commandant of the newly opened London Heathrow Airport in 1947 where he remained for ten years before his appointment as Deputy Chairman of the Air Transport Advisory Council (1957-61). During his time at Heathrow, he develops a new parallel system of runways to replace the triangular set up. He also draws up plans for the construction of terminals and a control tower and the main terminal building is still called D'Albiac House. The first ground controlled approach system is also installed at Heathrow while he was there.

He gave the speech at Speech Day in December 1946. He stressed the importance of national pride "As a nation we British are rather apt to belittle our achievements... We hear about what the Russians or the Americans did in the war, but I can assure you that whatever other nations did it was nothing compared to what the British people did.... For many long months we fought alone... We should never forget that, and we should not allow others to forget it. When you go out into the world you can hold your head high and be proud that you are British."

He was also President of the SOF (1948/49) when Brandeston hall was officially opened and the WW2 memorial in the College Chapel was unveiled on 2 July 1949, by HRH Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone. In his speech at Brandeston he said "The very soil on which we stand was saved for England by our comrades, boys whom we knew and loved... It is in memory of them that we are assembled here today and see before their eyes in letters of gold the famous words "Their swords are in your keeping", they will spare a thought for those brave men who made the supreme sacrifice."

He was also Chairman of Governors at the time of the launch of the Centenary Appeal for the building of the Athlone Hall, in 1964.

He died at Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, on 20 August 1963, aged sixty-nine.

