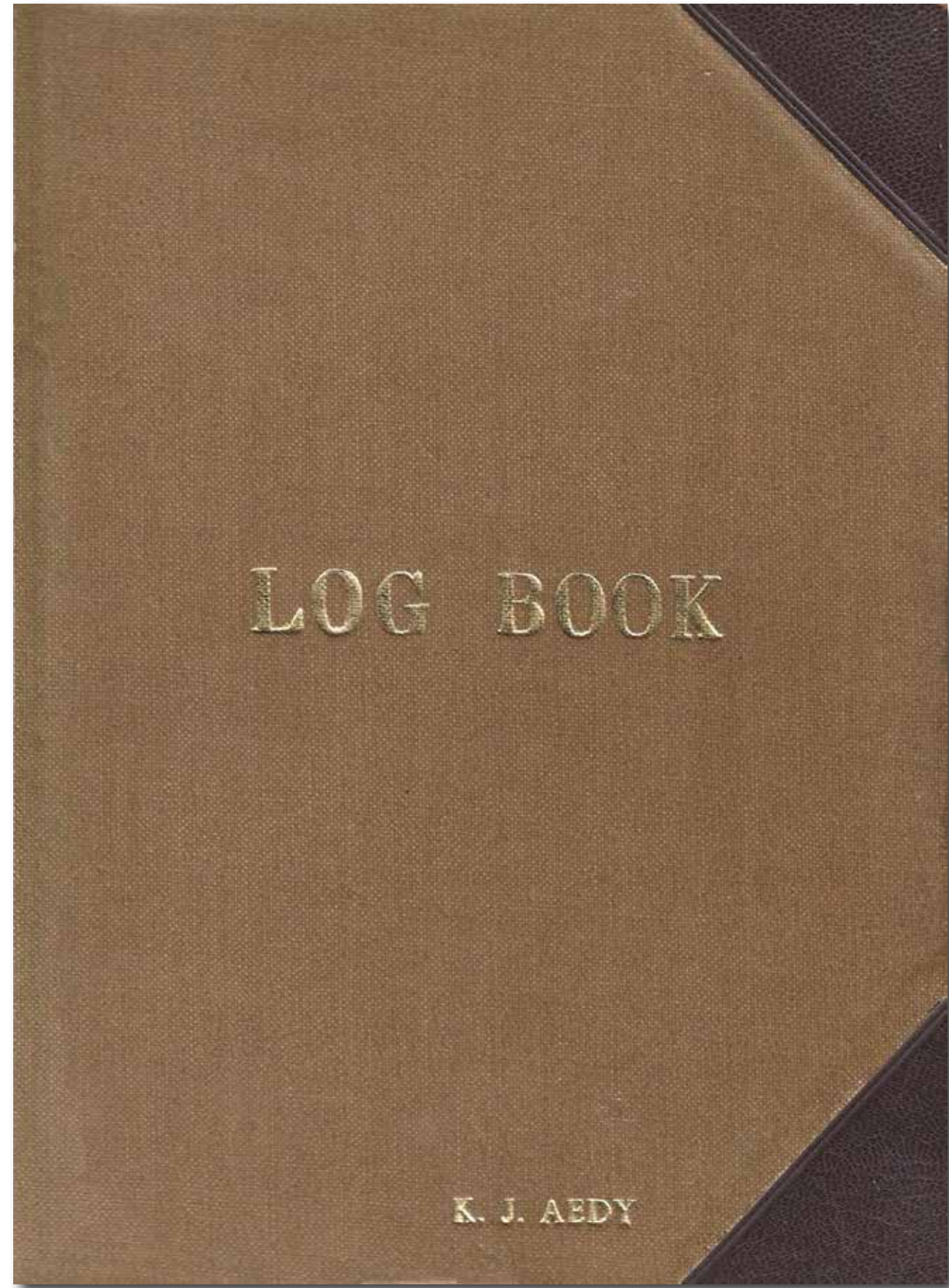


*FROM BIPLANES
TO FAST JETS*



FROM BIPLANES TO FAST JETS

**A pilot's life in the Royal Air Force 1942–1973
SQUADRON LEADER KEN AEDY**





“There are old pilots and bold pilots but no old, bold pilots.”

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FOREWORD

I was beyond excited. My father was taking me to my first football match at Wembley. It was an exhibition match on 3rd January 1973 called “The Three v The Six” to mark UK, Ireland and Denmark joining the Common Market (EU). The game included many famous players such as Bobby Charlton, Bobby Moore, Pat Jennings, Franz Beckenbauer and Gerd Müller.

We never saw the game. As the tube doors opened at Wembley underground station, my father clutched my arm and collapsed head-first onto the platform, which was heaving with spectators on the way to the match. No one helped us. It was the first of three heart attacks he endured in a three-month period, all with me. I was fourteen years old and I remember running up and down the platform seeking help, finally finding a policeman and then, in time, an ambulance arrived.

Dad was forty-nine years old, having led a very active life as a career pilot in the Royal Air Force since 1942. He remained beleaguered for the rest of his life, finally fading away in November 2001, aged seventy-seven.

By the late 1990s, Dad had been unwell for over twenty-five years. By that time, I was married with three young children: Thomas, Alice and Thibault. Dad was devoted to them and to Diane, my Belgian wife. At a family gathering around that time, Diane invited Dad to commit to paper his stories from his life in the Royal Air Force for the benefit of his grandchildren.

He finally died in November 2001 after a series of health complications. That evening, my sister Penny and I were at our family home with Mum, who asked me to check Dad’s “hand-cranked” old computer as he had mentioned he had scribbled a few notes for the children.

I discovered seventy pages of close-type, addressed to Thomas, Alice and Thibault, and they form the basis of these memoirs. The pages covered Dad’s life before the war, including several holidays at a bucolic farm in Somerset. At eighteen years old, in 1942, he joined the RAF straight from the Air Squadron at Southampton University. Somewhat appropriately for a dedicated cricket fan, he had his medical to join the RAF in the Long Room at Lord’s, home of the MCC.

Dad was taught to fly in Oklahoma in 1943, crossing the Atlantic on a troop ship. He returned in the UK on the converted *Queen Mary*, zigzagging across the sea to avoid U-boats. He trained on Wellington



CERTIFICATES OF QUALIFICATION AS FIRST PILOT

CERTIFIED that I understand the Fuel, Oil, Ignition, Cooling & Brake systems, the action in the event of Fire, and the take-off and landing drills on the following types of aircraft.		CERTIFIED that I have examined this pilot on the afore-mentioned systems, and that he is competent to fly Solo and with passengers on the following types of aircraft, in accordance with relevant A.F.O's.	
TYPE	SIGNATURE & RANK	DATE	SIGNATURE & RANK
TIGERMOTH	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.	25 th Feb. 1949	<i>S. C. ...</i> Sgt. Lt.
STEARNS	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.		
HARVARD	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.	25 th Feb. 1949	<i>S. C. ...</i> Sgt. Lt.
OXFORD	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.		
WELLINGTON	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.		
LANCASTER	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.	25 th Feb. 1949	<i>S. C. ...</i> Sgt. Lt.
PRENTICE	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.		
MOSQUITO	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.		
SPITEIRE	<i>K. G. Aedy</i> F.O.		

bombers prior to becoming operational over Germany in Lancasters and also dropped food supplies to the Dutch (the celebrated Operation Manna) and returned prisoners of war back to the UK. He was only twenty years old when Victory in Europe was declared.

Unlike many of his peers, he elected to remain in the RAF after the war and was posted in the late 1940s to Egypt, as Israel emerged as a newly-independent country, and in the early 1950s to Singapore. He met my mother there in 1951, when she was working in the Security Service. They were married in 1952 in St Andrew's Cathedral in Singapore. My sister Penny was born in 1953, just before they moved to Germany. Dad was then flying Hunters and Meteors, having transitioned to jets in the early 1950s.

Dad did not manage to complete the memoirs before he faded away, so they finish in 1957. He was posted to Cyprus to work in intelligence in the mid-1960s; Penny and I had an idyllic childhood there. He retired from the RAF in 1973, partly through ill-health, and then worked for many years in the National Health Service.

His memoirs are a remarkable story of flying, from biplanes through propeller bombers to fast jets – an extraordinary period for any pilot to fly. He was devoted to flying and to the RAF and felt very privileged to have the opportunity to fly in such a transformational era.

These, however, are not the memoirs of a hero. They represent the observations and experiences of an ordinary young man who witnessed extraordinary events in a period of enormous political turmoil and incredible technological change.

Penny and I felt it appropriate to publish the memoirs on 29th May 2024, the day our father would have been one hundred years old. The publication is principally a tribute to him and his dedicated military and public service. We also hope that they represent, in a small way, a tribute to his generation, to whom we all owe so much.

Mark Aedy
Frithwood Farm
West Sussex
August 2023





INTRODUCTION

This touching personal story of Ken Aedy's journey into the Royal Air Force, his wartime service, and his subsequent career, is a deeply moving testament to the man, his remarkable generation, and the extraordinary times they lived through.

Ken writes with self-deprecating humour. His passion for flying sings out from every page, as does his humanity, and his appreciation of the contribution made by the people around him.

It is a fascinating and entertaining account of a life of service, in war and peace, of the fellow travellers on that journey, and the enormous leaps in aircraft technology that were made during his Royal Air Force career. Ken evocatively puts us in the cockpits of the aircraft he flew – from the Tiger Moth biplane, to the Lancaster bomber, to the Javelin jet fighter – over 20 types in his Royal Air Force career.

As a 20-year-old Lancaster bomber pilot, Ken shouldered a staggering responsibility, all the more so given the risk of death was ever-present. Of the 125,000 aircrew who served alongside Ken in Bomber Command in the Second World War, over 57,000 were killed, and over 8,000 were wounded in action.

Ken went on to contribute to the massive humanitarian airlifts in the Netherlands as the Second World War ended, and Berlin as the Cold War began. He saw service in Palestine and the Far East and was an early leader of our jet-age fighter squadrons defending Europe against the threat of Soviet attack.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Ken and all of his generation who fought for our freedom in the Second World War, and kept the peace in the Cold War. Their courage and dedication inspires those who have followed in their footsteps.

That debt of gratitude is something our Service charities strive to honour every day, wherever assistance is needed across the Royal Air Force community: veterans; those still serving; and their families. It is a fitting testament to Ken that proceeds from the sale of this book will go to the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, helping them continue their critical mission into the future.

Ken's memoirs were never completed, but we have enough to recognise and celebrate the contribution he made through a great life, albeit tinged with a yearning to have heard more. Above all, this memoir makes a wonderful read, to be enjoyed by future generations.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston KCB CBE
Chief of the Air Staff 2019–2023

To Thibault, Alice and Thomas

