





## **Chamberlain George Philip (S23 Entry) Fighter Interception Unit**

An estate manager's son, George Philip Chamberlain was born at Enville, Staffordshire on 18 August 1905. He was re-christened Peter by his wife, Alfreda, who thought "Phil" too feminine. After attending Denstone College and the RAF College, Cranwell he was commissioned in 1925 and posted to Hawkinge, Kent flying Gloster Grebe biplanes.

In 1927, he went to the North-West Frontier with No 5 Army Co-operation Squadron.

Three years later, he joined the Electrical and Wireless School at Cranwell. After signals staff postings, he flew Bristol Bulldog biplanes with 17 Squadron, then attended staff college. He had a signals appointment at No 16 Group and in 1939 moved to the signals staff of No 18, the Maritime Group. Two years later he left Tangmere to join Coastal Command Headquarters as chief signals officer, hunting U-boats.

Chamberlain was a brilliant signals and electronics specialist and helped to develop the air interception radar used by night-fighters in the Battle of Britain.

In the summer of 1940, Wing Commander Chamberlain led Fighter Development Unit experimental work at the coastal fighter station at Tangmere, Sussex, using early radar sets. Tangmere was heavily bombed and it proved difficult to launch Spitfires, let alone the Blenheim bombers which had been converted for night-fighting in railway workshops at Ashford, Kent.

During one raid on the air-field Chamberlain's car was destroyed. Infuriated, he jumped into the nearest fighter and made to take off. In the nick of time a member of the ground crew yelled at him to stop; the aircraft's tail had been blown to pieces. Despite countless frustrations caused by the inadequacy of the radar equipment, Chamberlain persevered.

On the night of July 22 he was rewarded when, acting as Tangmere controller, he brought about the first successful night interception. Flying Officer "Jumbo" Ashfield, Pilot Officer G E Morris and Sgt R H Leyland were on patrol in a Blenheim at 10,000 ft off Bognor Regis when Chamberlain alerted them to a group of raiders crossing the coast at about 6000 ft. Ashfield went into a shallow dive and radar contact was made at one mile. At 400yds, Ashfield opened fire. The Dornier was still "bombed-up" and exploded in Ashfield's face, showering the Blenheim with debris and throwing it on its back. It was the first time an enemy night raider had been shot down with the help of airborne radar.

For the next year Chamberlain led from the front. He seemed never to sleep, test-flying by day and taking up a Blenheim at night at any hint of enemy activity. Later, improved radar and better aircraft became available, and "Cat's Eyes" Cunningham and other successful squadron commanders developed night-fighting into a great art.

In 1943, Chamberlain was seconded to the Royal Australian Air Force to help to develop radar.

The next year he was appointed chief signals officer at Transport Command and organised signals on the Empire and European air routes.

When peace came Chamberlain was seconded to the Ministry of Civil Aviation. He attended the Imperial Defence College and returned to RAF staff work in 1950 as Air Officer Administration, Middle East Air Force. The next year he was appointed to command the RAF Transport Wing in the Middle East. When local staff walked out, Alfreda Chamberlain organised the RAF wives into working parties.

From 1953 to 1954 Chamberlain was commandant of the RAF Staff College, Andover, then headed the administration at HQ Fighter Command.

In 1957, he was seconded to the Ministry of Supply as deputy controller of electronics. He later served in a similar role at the Ministry of Aviation and retired in 1960.

He joined the Collins Radio Company as managing director and was later a non-executive director.

In 1968, Chamberlain, who had done much to make flying safer, was fined for flying over the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough without informing control.