

# RAF COLLEGE CRANWELL

## Sqn Ldr GH Martingell AFC RAF



Researched by Paul Allonby RAeS RHist Soc

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# INTRODUCTION

The focus of the Cranwellian Historical Society (CHS) website is on the ***Cranwellian***, specifically the trainees who have undergone initial officer training at the RAF College, their careers in the RAF and their collective contributions to an unrivalled College history. Within the CHS, we extend the definition of Cranwellian to include the College founders, commandants, directing staff and support staff without whom the College would not have been able to exist.

One of the benefits of the CHS website is that we receive helpful feedback from a variety of interested parties, not least some alumni themselves, their relatives and military historians who can add their own perspective to the events that chart College history. This album is a typical example.

The definition of Cranwellian on this occasion is accorded to Sqn Ldr Gilbert Henry Martingell AFC, RAF, who was the Chief Flying Instructor at RAF Cranwell from March 1933 until his untimely death in an air crash at the College on 20 February 1936. During his time at the College, he will have instructed many of the cadets on S31, J32, S32, J33, S33, J34, S34, J35, S35 and possibly J36 Entries, including distinguished Cranwellians Broughton, Dowland-Ryan, Inness, Kelly, Lapsley, McConnell, Menaul, Pitcairn-Hill, Tait, Townsend, Weir, Wheeler, Wilson and Wykeham-Barnes. [Click on <https://www.cranwellian-ian.com/look-up/ewExternalFiles/LUTPRE-WWIIHONOURED.pdf>]

That we are able to pay any tribute to Martingell in this album is credit to the dedication of Paul Allonby, a professional researcher and author of some 10 books, who approached the Cranwellian Association to kindly donate his findings on Martingell whilst he had been researching AC1 Robert Tomlinson, the airman who sadly was also killed in Martingell's fatal crash. Paul specialises in researching military aviation (mainly 1920-1950) and has written or collaborated on many biographies typically with schools and universities. Paul had been attracted to researching Tomlinson because, like Paul and his family, he was a Rotherham man. As is often the case when researching one particular individual's career, more information comes to light on another who deserves attention. Fortunately for us, Paul's diligence in pursuing leads on Martingell's career has yielded information that we would not have found through our own efforts. We should like to thank Paul for his diligence and kindness in offering the notes he compiled on Martingell.

Therefore, this album is very much a reflection of Paul Allonby's research. Taking his notes as the baseline, we have offered some extra information to place into context Martingell's career and CFI duties at the RAF College.

# EARLY LIFE

**DOVER COLLEGE**

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## A 12th Century Priory



Dover College was founded on 15 September 1871 by a group of local businessmen, led by the Mayor of Dover, Dr Astley, who considered that it would be beneficial for the town to have its own public school.

The College sits in idyllic surroundings in the grounds of a 12th Century Benedictine Priory. The first 15 boys occupied St Martin's House under the guidance of the first headmaster, Canon William Bell. Bell was a strict disciplinarian. His energetic wife, who cared deeply for the boys, looking after all their day-to-day needs, balanced his huge presence around College. Mrs. Bell died young, in 1892 the clock tower was added on to the Chapel in her memory.

A 12th Century Priory

World War 1

1920 - 1940

World War 2

1940 - 1980

1980 - 2021

Born at Folkestone, Kent, on 3 July 1896, Gilbert Henry **Martingell** had two elder sisters and later a younger brother.

His father was Councillor Henry Martingell (1861-1917) who was very active in promoting the town - whether it was horse racing, football, tourism, entertainment or aviation. Henry was a director of the resort's first automobile dealership, and lived with his wife Grace and the children in Folkestone.

Gilbert attended Dover College (a boarding school in Dover), and worked for his father as a trainee manager prior to enlisting in the Royal Fusiliers as a Private in 1915.

His unit was attached to the 19th Battalion, and was one where officer cadet candidates were schooled and then selected for Officer Training, which was carried out at Balliol College, Oxford.

Royal Fusiliers Cap Badge



# EARLY ARMY SERVICE



In November 1915, Martingell travelled in an advanced party ahead of the main unit of the Royal Fusiliers, which arrived a month later. Their period in France primarily involved manning defensive positions, repairing or building trenches, practical logistics and re-arming procedures, and repairing breaches in barbed wire.

Returning to the UK, Martingell - after his passing-out parade - was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in August 1916 as a Second Lieutenant and in October gained his wings, achieving Royal Aero Club certificate 3821.



## 19th (2nd Public School) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers

19th (2nd Public Schools) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) was raised in at Epsom on the 11th of September 1914 by the Public Schools and University Men's Force. Following initial training near home, on the 26th of June 1915 they joined 98th Brigade, 33rd Division. The Division concentrated at Clipstone camp near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire in July 1915. In August they moved to Salisbury Plain for final training and firing practice. They proceeded France in November and by the 21st, 33rd Division had concentrated near Morbecque, being strengthened by the exchange of 98th Brigade for the experienced 19th Brigade from 2nd Division. On the 26th of February 1916 the battalion transferred to GHQ and was disbanded on the 24th of April 1916 with many of the men being commissioned.

# RAF SERVICE



His RFC career details are sketchy, albeit in June 1919 he did receive the Air Force Cross for "distinguished service". The transfer from RFC to RAF in April 1918 records him among the ranks of "Aeroplane and Seaplane Officers" (RAF Museum).

## LXX (B) Sqn



Martingell opted to remain in the RAF post-war. In March 1924, there is a laconic entry on an RAF Casualty form that Martingell - serving with 70 (Bomber) Sqn at RAF Hinadi (Iraq) suffered a "fractured ankle while wrestling in the Officers Mess". During that time, from reforming in 1920, the Squadron was operating firstly Vickers Vimy and then Vickers Vernon and the Victoria, fulfilling also a pan-Middle East transport role.

His career then took an exciting twist, as Commanding Officer (Acting Wing-Commander) of 15 Squadron at RAF Martlesham Heath in March 1930, responsible for delivering practical outcomes for the Aeroplane & Armaments Experimental Establishment. The unit's ORB records him supervising a variety of projects ranging from heavier payload delivery, to high-altitude bombing up to 18,000-feet. Another aspect was using flares to target-mark, used to great effect by the RAF Pathfinders in WW2.

Then, three-years later, it was a move for him and his wife to Cranwell. (Their 1931 wedding saw the couple depart from Sywell (built on land owned by the bride's father and operated by the Northants. Aero Club) on a "flying honeymoon" to the south of France in Martingell's blue Gypsy Moth.."the bride dressed to match their novel wedding carriage" - The Tatler.)

## XV Sqn



## A&AEE



## RAFC



Vickers Vimy



Vickers Vernon



Vickers Victoria



DH60 Gypsy Moth

# FATAL ACCIDENT



Martingell was the Chief Flying Instructor at Cranwell from March 1933 until his death in an aircraft crash on 20 February 1936 when Avro Tutor K3201 crashed behind the college at Bristol Wood. Both he and his observer, AC1 Robert Tomlinson, were killed instantly. The cause of the crash could not be pinpointed, but it broke up when attempting to recover from a spin.

Testimony given at the inquest (Lincolnshire County Archives) included:

Sgt Charles Pope - inspected aircraft 08.15-08.30am prior to the first of three flights that morning. All in order. 11.45am AC(2) William Andrew Streurhen saw the two airmen aboard the Tutor, did an external inspection, and gave the "Thumbs-Up" to proceed.

Kathleen Gibbons, housekeeper to Wing-Commander Prettyman, was working in the kitchen at his house on the base when she spotted the Tutor "diving down like a bullet very low" before trees obscured her views. Staff and pupils at the base school heard the impact - as did Mrs Martingell, in their airfield home, 200-yards from the crash site, her view again masked by trees.

Sgt Herbert Singer, working as a Watch Station duty observer, saw the Tutor enter into a spin at 11.55am then recover before apparently stalling and crashing downwards "from a very low height".

Medical officer Flt-Lt Ogilvie Murray Frazer viewed both bodies in situ. He noted the parachute of AC Tomlinson was wedged within the aircraft's dual controls. Both men had died of "forward facing" skull fractures plus broken arms and broken legs. AC Tomlinson, he observed, was crouched with both arms extended towards the parachute while Sqn-Ldr Martingell had fractures to his fingers, wrists and forearms where he'd tried to control the aircraft.



Avro Tutor