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RAF WEST RAYNHAM MISSILE SQUADRON TO BE DISBANDED

The remaining units of the Bloodhound Anti Aircraft Missile Force are to disband with effect from 1 Jul 91. The units are the Headquarters and A and B Flights of No 85 Sqn. The HQ and A Flt are based at West Raynham, B Flt is at RAF Wattisham. Overall the force is 192 officers and airmen strong. The two parent Stations will remain open. The disbandment is not a result of options for change but follows a routine re assessment of the cost effectiveness of Bloodhound.

The RAF personnel involved will be redeployed to other stations and tasks, 151 from West Raynham and 41 from Wattisham, over the coming months. There will be a further redeployment of some West Raynham personnel when disposal procedures for the Bloodhound equipment have been completed, probably late this year. No civilian post is directly affected by the initial reductions.

No 85 Sqn

85 Sqn was originally formed at Upavon on 1 Aug 1917 and equipped with SE5a single-seater fighters. The Sqn moved to France in May of the following year and operated from various airfields on the continent until the cessation of hostilities on 11 Nov 1918. Although no detailed history of this period is available, 85's success as a fighter Sqn must have been considerable; one report shows a score of 39 victories in 14 days. During its stay in France, the Sqn was commanded by two VCs - "Mick" Mannock and "Billy" Bishop.

No 85 holds the unique record of being the only Sqn to have been commanded by two holders of the VC. The Sqn returned to England in Feb 1919 and was disbanded in Jul of the same year.

In Jun 1938 the Sqn was re-formed at Debden, being equipped initially with Gloster Gladiators, and converting later that year to Hawker Hurricanes. It was assigned to the RAF Component Field Force in Jun 1939, and returned to France on 9



Sep 1939, after a 20 year absence. Its pilots saw intensive action during the Battle of France in May 1940, when they destroyed 89 enemy aircraft in ten days. With the fall of France, the Sqn returned to Debden to re-equip.

After two months of routine patrols, the Sqn was in combat again during the opening phases of the Battle of Britain. Under the command of Sqn Ldr Peter Townsend it secured 54 victories in this Battle.

On 10 Oct 1940, together with 151 Sqn, 85 Sqn became one of the first of the specialist night flying squadrons; a role which, in various guises, it continued to carry out until the end of the war. Aircraft used for this task were the Hawker Hurricane, the Boulton Paul Defiant, the Douglas Havoc, and finally the famous De Havilland Mosquito. It was in the Mosquito during these years that Wg Cdr "Cats Eyes" Cunningham and Flt Lt Rawnsley, his radar operator, helped to raise the number of Sqn victories to a final total of 278 enemy aircraft and 33 V-1 flying bombs.

From the end of the Second World War until Apr 1963, 85 Sqn remained in Fighter Command operating, in turn, Mosquito, Meteor NF, and Javelin aircraft in the night fighter role.

In Apr 63, on the change of role to one of Target Facilities,

the Javelin aircraft were replaced with Canberras, supported by Meteors. The last operational sortie by a Meteor was flown in Jun 1970.

On 18 Dec 75 the 85 Sqn number plate was transferred to a newly formed Bloodhound surface-to-air missile Sqn which joined the 11 Gp Order-of-Battle on 1 Jul 76. The Sqn was fully assigned to NATO. With four flights deployed along the East Coast, at North Coates, West Raynham and Bawdsey, "Eighty Five" played a leading role in the air defence of the United Kingdom. Later the missile flights of No 25 Sqn were absorbed by 85 extending Squadron cover to Wyton, Wattisham and Barkston Heath. In 1990, a retrenchment reduced 85 Sqn to A and B Flights at West Raynham and Wattisham respectively. Final closure is to come on 1 Jul 1991.

Its Sqn Badge, which was presented to "Eighty Five" in May 43, has been described as a "Hexagon voided upon an Ogress" with the motto "Noctu Diuque Venamur" (We hunt by night and day). It is of interest to note that the hexagon, an identification geometric symbol, was first assigned to the Sqn in 1918, in France. It has been used as the Sqn insignia ever since. The Sqn number will now be held in reserve until required for allocation to a newly formed Unit.
