

**THE HISTORY OF**  
**No 492 (SOLIHULL) SQUADRON ATC**  
**1941 TO 2007**

Date of Formation	February 21 <sup>st</sup> 1941
Title on Formation	No 492 (Hall Green and Sparkhill) Squadron
Address on Formation	The Beacon Insurance Company Ltd Stratford Road Hall Green Birmingham B 28
Changes of Address	1946 10 Green Road Hall Green Birmingham B28  1947 T A Centre Cateswell House Barracks Stratford Road Hall Green Birmingham B28
Change of Title	1967 No 492(Solihull) Squadron
Changes of Address	1967 TA Centre Haslucks Green Road Shirley Solihull West Midlands  2001 1 Cadet Drive Shirley Solihull West Midlands B90 2FD

## Commanding Officers

1941-1943	Flt Lt A C Hodson RAF VR(T)
1943-1946	Flt Lt W Allen RAF VR(T)
1946-1947	Flt Lt G Whalley RAF VR(T)
1947-1951	Flt Lt T H Bailey RAF VR(T)
1951-1959	Flt Lt S Swift RAF VR(T)
1959-1965	Flt Lt R C J Baugh RAF VR(T)
1965-1976	Flt Lt W V Davis RAF VR(T)
1976-1983	Flt Lt L B Latham RAF VR(T)
1983-1988	Flt Lt G Roberts RAF VR(T)
1988-1990	Flt Lt J Stroud RAF VR(T)
1990-1991	Flt Lt P M Talbot RAF VR(T)
1991-1993	Flt Lt I R Wilson RAF VR(T)
1993-1995	Flt Lt L B Latham MBE RAF VR(T)
1995-2003	Flt Lt S D Iles BSc RAF VR(T)
2003-2005	Flt Lt L Elvins BEng CEng MIEE RAF VR(T)
Present Commanding Officer 2005-	Flt Lt E D Hemes MEng (Hons) CEng MIMechE RAF VR(T)

## Civilian Committee Chairman

1941-1946	Mr Sidney J Pratt JP
1946-1947	Mr W H Hargreaves
1947-1956	Sqn Ldr A C Hodson RAF VR(T)(Rtd)
1956-1967	Col E R Price TD DL
1967-1971	Sqn Ldr T H Bailey RAF VR(T)
1971-1973	Flt Lt W W Small RAF VR(T)(Rtd)
1973-1977	Flt Lt R C J Baugh RAF VR(T)(Rtd)
1977-1980	Mr H Keepax
1980-1980	Flt Lt N W Page RAF VR(T)(Rtd)
1980-1984	Mrs Mary Jones
1984-1993	Sqn Ldr W V Davis RAF VR(T)(Rtd)
1993-2005	Mrs Ann Pearmain
Present Committee Chairman	2005- Mr John Pook

## Squadron History and Matters of Interest

The Squadron was originally formed as Hall Green and Sparkhill Squadron on 24th February 1941 although recruiting took place earlier in the month. Drill was already in progress under the watchful eye of FS Manning from Central Headquarters. Within a matter of weeks the Squadron was inundated with recruits and by the beginning of 1942 was one of the largest squadrons in the area with parades averaging three hundred cadets.

The local school provided classrooms which were in use most nights of the week for mathematics, morse, navigation, engine theory, aircraft recognition and all the other subjects which were to become part of the syllabus.

The Unit started a drum, bugle and fife band very early on under Bandmaster E James and this quickly gained popularity in the district.

The local Church Fellowship became the meeting place of the Squadron personnel and the Vicar and Padre the Rev Chatterton played an enthusiastic role.

At the first Birmingham Wing parade held in Handsworth Park the Squadron came second in the Leek Trophy. It was won by their friendly rivals No 496(Solihull) Squadron but they exacted revenge in the following year by winning it themselves. In addition they won two Zone Trophies :- the Embly Cup for the most efficient squadron and the Lancaster Cup for sport.

Nineteen forty three was a hectic year. On the 14th March the Lord Mayor of Birmingham Councillor Walter S Lewis, who was an ATC officer, visited the Squadron. He was provided with a Guard of Honour comprising some sixty cadets and a full drum, bugle and fife band and remarked how very impressed he was with the turnout. On May 1201 another VIP, Sir Ernest Canning, visited and reviewed a similar parade. The 15th May the Squadron band lead a Coventry "Wings for Victory" parade at which Air Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham GCMG KCB CMG DSO AFC took the salute.

Shortly afterwards the Unit received a letter from him congratulating the band on its efficiency and smartness. Sadly in August 1943 Cdt K Wiggins was killed in an air crash while attending camp at RAF Wittering.

In October of that year the Squadron were told officially that they held the record in the Midlands for the largest number of cadets joining the Forces.

The Unit was inspected by Sqn Ldr Humphries in the middle of 1944 and he was so impressed that he arranged a visit by the Commandant. The parade and inspection was carried out on June 18th by Air Marshal Sir Leslie Gossage KCB CVO DSO MC accompanied by Grp Capt J A C Wright Officer Commanding Midland Command. Both praised the Unit on its efficiency.

During this time the Unit decided to give a squadron badge to all cadets who left to join the Services. The badge was and still is an eagle carrying a torch (which symbolises the learning given to cadets). Reports have been received from former cadets meeting in various theatres of war, who, although they served in the squadron at different times, did not know one another, but became friends owing to their having this 492 badge.

Three huts were erected on Jack Moulds Athletic ground at this time and these gave the Squadron more accommodation and sports facilities.

Due to circumstances beyond their control the Unit was forced to leave its Headquarters at the Beacon Insurance Company offices and moved to a house belonging to the TA in Green Road, Hall Green in preparation for a permanent move into the barracks itself. The move took place early in 1947 and the Squadron settled down in three huts provided for them in Cateswell House Barracks. Many former cadets returned at this time to take up positions as officers and instructors.

During 1960 No 496 (Solihull) Squadron closed down and Fg Off W Jones RAFVR(T) together with a number of their cadets joined the Squadron.

At this time a thriving radio team was at work (Call sign Mike Romeo Bravo 72) but it was disbanded a few years later as no instructor was available.

Cadet Hoyle while on a gliding course was involved in an accident but escaped without injury although the pilot was killed.

There was no ATC presence in Solihull itself for some seven years after 496's closure, although boys continued to join the local units such as 489 (Acocks Green & Olton), 2030 (Elmdon & Yardley) and of course 492 (Hall Green & Sparkhill). Due to the reorganization of the Territorial Army in 1966 and the closing down of Cateswell House Barracks 492 was once more uprooted and in 1967 was moved to the TA Centre in Haslucks Green Road, Shirley and re-designated as 492 (Solihull) Squadron under the command of Flight Lieutenant W V Davis RAFVR(T). They were equipped with one Canadian cedar wood "Spooner" hut but obtained for themselves a further wooden building from Solihull Council. This building had been a clinic and was given to the Unit on the understanding that it would be dismantled within six weeks and re-erected at the Barracks at their own expense.

On 20th June 1972 the Unit obtained its first aircraft, a Bristol Sycamore 3 Helicopter G ALST/WA577 and this was used for instructional purposes. In 1978 it was transferred to No 493 (Kings Heath & Moseley) Squadron having outlasted its usefulness in the training programme.

On April 1, 1978, the unit was presented with a Banner by the Solihull Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association. On a parade attended by the many dignitaries and parents, it was handed over by Group Captain A Reece DSO OBE DFC AFC MBIM RAFRO, Commandant North and West Region Air Training Corps in the presence of the Mayor of Solihull Councillor N Green and Mrs Green and Mr W J Chignell, Chairman of the Solihull Branch, Royal Air Forces Association and the Officer Commanding, the Warwickshire and Birmingham Wing, Wing Commander R K W Glover OBE DFC TD RAFVR(T). The Blessing of the Standard was conducted by the Reverend Peter Heaps RD, Chaplain to the Warwickshire and Birmingham Wing.

During the late 1970's and early 1980's, under the command of Flight Lieutenant L B Latham RAFVR(T) and his very efficient staff, the unit went from strength to strength becoming one of the top Squadrons in the Corps. Many of the cadets joined the Royal Air Force and are still flying and performing ground duties in the Service. At one stage six cadets, ground staff and flying personnel, were stationed at RAF Marham all at the same time.

Nineteen eighty one was the 40th Anniversary of the Air Training Corps and the Squadron organised a dinner at the TA Centre in Solihull to commemorate the occasion.

In 1984 the Unit was allowed to recruit females for the first time. Shortly afterwards a Detached Flight was inaugurated at Balsall Common and given the designation No 492 (Balsall Common) D/F. For administrative reasons this was transferred to No 1368 (Warwick & Royal Leamington Spa) Squadron in 1988

Girls have done remarkably well with the Squadron. CWO Karen Nolan was the first female ever to be granted the honour of being a Lord Lieutenant's Cadet and was also a nominee for the Dacre Brooch. In addition she was the first female cadet of the Warwickshire and Birmingham Wing to be commissioned in the WRAFVR(T). CWO P J Whittaker was another female bringing distinction to the Unit. She was Regional representative for the Dacre Brooch and obtained a Navigation Scholarship. Another female CWO K Smiley and two males:- Cdt FS Sawyer and Cdt FS Pearson were also honoured by becoming Lord Lieutenant's Cadets.

Between 1977 and 1984 the Squadron produced a number of cadets who were successful in the International Air Cadet Exchange Scheme and in 1979 were the hosts for participants from abroad.

On 1st April 1978 the Unit was presented with a Banner by the Solihull Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association. On a parade attended by many dignitaries and parents the Banner was handed over by Grp Capt A Reece DSO OBE DFC MBIM RAFRO. After the presentation and parade there was an exhibition of

squadron activities in the hall of the TA Barracks. A further exhibition of the work of the Unit took place at Solihull Library during March 1980 especially for the benefit of the local population. It received high praise.

During January 1985 the nose-section of English Electric Canberra WT534 was delivered to the Squadron from No 489(Acocks Green and Olton) Squadron.

In 1990 Fit Lt L B Latham RAFVR(T) a former Commanding Officer of No 492(Solihull) Squadron was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

During the year of the 50th Anniversary of the Corps the Squadron held an Anniversary Dinner in the Clubroom of the Rover Works at Solihull. It was a highly successful evening and over one hundred and fifty people attended including many "old boys" from the 1940's.

Over the years the Unit has taken part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, in shooting competitions and in many marches principally at Nijmegen. The Squadron provided the Services with many personnel during the War. The total is unknown, but some received decorations and many served as aircrew and groundstaff. Former cadets, Fit Lt A Jones and Fit Lt C Mason flew Tornados in the Gulf War while Fit Lt G Sawyer was stationed at a Tornado Operational Conversion Unit. Fit Lt M Driver became Officer Commanding a unit of the Royal Air Force Regiment and Fit Lt D Biddle was at RAF Lyneham. Squadron Leader M Barter on promotion to Wing Commander returned to RAF Odiham as Officer Commanding No 7 Squadron flying Chinooks. He later went on to become Air Commodore Barter and Commandant of the RAF College Cranwell. Thus the Squadron motto, "Enter to learn, go forth to Serve" has obviously inspired many of the Unit's cadets both during and after membership.

An 'Old Boy's' Association met four times each year during the nineties and many of the association continue to show an active interest in the squadron into the next two decades with their roles in the Solihull RAFA, in particular Ray Baugh, Wg Cdr Vic Sayfritz (Ret'd), Bryan Latham MBE and Norman Page.

In 1995, Flight Lieutenant S D Iles RAFVR(T) was appointed Commanding Officer of the Squadron. This was followed by a number of ex-cadets taking up positions in uniformed and civilian roles. With this new start for 1995 the numbers of cadets increased, resulting in an upgrade to D2 Status. The Squadron has maintained a cadet strength of over fifty cadets since 1995 and this has resulted in a lot of success. In 1996, several of the Wing Junior Rugby Team was made up of 492 cadets and cdt FS Hemes went on to represent the Region and score a try in 1997.

Under Fit Lt Iles command the Squadron did very well at Wing Field day in 1997. Notable results were 2<sup>nd</sup> place for the Drill team with CWO Emma Macdonald winning first place as the best Drill NCO and the Netball team who came second. CWO MacDonald later took commission and married to become Fg Off Emma Thomas and was an excellent adjutant for several years.

In 1998 cadet Nicola Jackson represented the Squadron, the Wing, Central and East Region and the Corp at Netball and the squadron went on to win the 'Per Ardua' Cup for the first time since 1995 and 1991 prior to that ('Per Ardua' Cup is the trophy for the best sqn in WARKS & Birmingham Wing from Bryan Latham MBE former OC of 492).

492 won best Drill team at Wing Field Day in 2000-2003 (inclusive) and at Regional Field Day in both 2001 and 2002 under the instruction of WO Tim Lloyd, a former CWO on the squadron. There was also some success with the Lees Trophy competition with a third place result in 2000.

On 6<sup>th</sup> September 2001 the squadron was forced to move to new, purpose built premises on a shared site with the ACF and Sea Cadets. The TA Centre proved too lucrative for the government and budget constraints in the MoD forced its sale and the relocation of the residing TA unit. The official opening of the new building on Cadet Drive was on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2001 by the Lord Lieutenant Sir Robert Richard Taylor OBE KStJ KCVO. Whilst the building lacked the character, charm and size of the old premises, it is none-the-less the envy of most squadrons in the Wing and an excellent facility.

23rd November 2006 was 492 Squadron's annual presentation night and 65th Anniversary celebration at the Royal British Legion in Shirley. 489 and 492 were approached by the Police to help out on Dorsington Road and Mickleton Road of Olton, which were of growing concern due to an increase in anti-social behaviour of the local youths and a build up of litter in the two streets. Consequently residents had formed

a negative view of young people. With support from the Police, around twenty staff and cadets from 489 and 492 cleared as much litter as possible. DCI Kenny Bell of West Midlands Police awarded 492 and 489 a Blue Lamp Certificate for their efforts and he stressed the importance of groups such as the ATC maintaining a high profile image of the majority of youths and the good work they undertake in the community.

The building interior was refurbished over the Christmas period of 2006. This was an ideal opportunity for the recently appointed Commanding Officer Flt Lt Elliot Hemes (succeeding Flt Lt Lee Elvins, ex-cadet, long serving Fg Off with Flt Lt Iles and OC for 2 years) to bring the trophies and plaques on the walls up to date and ensure they continued to be relevant to the current occupants. The Air Training Corps has evolved much over many decades and 492 has had to move with the times to continue to appeal to modern young people and society's expectations.

In 2007 civilian instructor Keith Groen installed a business standard, secure network and IT system throughout the squadron, providing unequalled multimedia presentation capabilities in the Wing at the time. It complemented the squadron's excellent website ([www.492aircadets.org](http://www.492aircadets.org)) which would later see massive redesign and improvements in 2009.

Cadet FS Ben Homer was awarded the Kriegie Trophy at a ceremony in early 2007. Every year, selected Air Cadets attend Cadet Leadership Courses at the Cadet Training Centre (CTC), Frimley Park. The Kriegie Trophy is awarded to the Cadet who, in the opinion of the Commandant and the staff officers of CTC Frimley Park, was the best of the Air Cadets who attended the course in that particular year. This was the first time that a cadet from Warwickshire & Birmingham Wing had won this prestigious award. Ben also received a personal letter from Commandant Air Cadets, Air Commodore Gordon Moulds officially congratulating him for his 'tremendous achievement'. In attendance at the ceremony to present the trophy was Air Commodore (Retd) Charles H Clarke, President/Chairman of the RAF ex-POW Association, accompanied by Wg Cdr (Retd) Bernard MBC CEng MIEE MCIM and Mr John K Banfield, both members of the RAF ex-POW A. Kriegie is short for Kriegsgefangener which is German for 'prisoner of war'.